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**A Special, Set-Apart Place No Longer?
The Rhetoric of Modern Nonprofit Organizations**

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**A Special, Set-Apart Place No Longer?
The Rhetoric of Modern Nonprofit Organizations**

by

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Dedication

To Rod and Peggy Hart. One who knowingly and patiently made me a scholar. The other who, unknowingly, was my ideal audience.

Acknowledgements

In many ways, writing a dissertation is like running a marathon. At first, you question your ability—Can I really do this? These doubts are minimized as you begin training. Coaches equip you with the strength and skills you will need and, having run the race before, share their wisdom and experience. I have had excellent coaches such as Sharon Jarvis. My head coach, Rod Hart, typically works with elite athletes but has a weakness for underdogs. He toughened me up, taught me the rules of the road, and always made me work harder and give more. During the race, volunteers make your journey possible, providing assistance and encouragement. I am fortunate to have had Debbie Wise and Melissa Huebsch always cheering me on. And my sister, Amy Balanoff, ran with me, sharing the ups and downs and engaging in a bit of friendly competition along the way. Finally, there is always that individual who, although not running themselves, patiently listens to a never-ending discussion about the race, gets up at 4 AM to drop you off at the start, braves the weather and the crowds to see you run, and is standing there at the finish line—ready to both soothe your aches and pains and celebrate. I had not one but three of these remarkable individuals: my husband Bryan Jones, my father Howard Balanoff, and my mother Marilyn Balanoff. Without each of you, this journey would have never been possible.

A Special, Set-Apart Place No Longer?
The Rhetoric of Modern Nonprofit Organizations

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This dissertation is about the tension produced by competing value orientations in the nonprofit and voluntary sector (NPVS). Historically, American nonprofit organizations (NPOs) were imbued with an ideological privilege rooted in the utopian, religious beginnings of the sector and premised on existence of the NPVS as a “special set-apart place,” an arena of human action uncontaminated by both government and the market. Today, major financial, institutional, and cultural forces exert tremendous pressure on NPOs and, as a result, these groups have been thrust into a more competitive social system. How might nonprofits cope with these new challenges? In a review of the NPVS literature, I identify two suggestions commonly advocated by researchers and practitioners: (1) That NPOs remain true to the traditional, *societal value orientation*, or that (2) NPOs adopt a more *market-oriented* approach. The values and related assumptions of these orientations are detailed and this conceptual model is applied to the newsletters of twenty-one diverse nonprofit organizations. In what follows, I describe the clash of societal values and market values, explain the effects of the struggle between

these combatants on contemporary NPOs, and demonstrate that this battle left rhetorical scars now evident in how nonprofits discuss four common organizational concerns—identity, trust, hierarchy, and mission. My overall finding is that nonprofit organizations have lost their presumptive ideological privilege as a result of the constant strain between societal and market values. In examining the implications of this thesis, I hold that the halcyon days of NPOs are not forever gone and, to that end, five communication strategies for modern nonprofit and voluntary organizations are offered.

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Chapter 1: Value Orientations in the Contemporary NPVS

“Our nonprofit ethos is a kind of religion on which we have been raised.”

--Dan Pallotta

“The days of running the YMCA like a church are gone...You can’t run a nonprofit as if it was not a business.”

--Executive Director, YMCA

INTRODUCTION

The nonprofit and voluntary sector (NPVS) is a deeply ingrained part America’s civic heritage. Citizens stumble when asked to name their representative in Congress, identify the three branches of government, or the number of amendments to the U.S. constitution. Ostensibly, Americans would have less difficulty pointing to the contributions of the country’s nonprofit organizations (NPOs). They might single out neighborhood soup kitchens, groups of undergraduates mentoring younger students, local women’s civics leagues, or, perhaps, summer fan drives for the elderly. The examples would be diverse, but the common theme would be an emphasis on small, volunteer-driven organizations that exist because of contributions of money, time, and goods from individuals (Carson, 2002).

Where did this idyllic image come from? Much of what Americans believe about the NPVS can be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville. His early impressions of the United States, recorded in the classic Democracy in America (1835/2000), focused on the ability of common citizens to get things done. As he understood it: “the inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion or a feeling which they wish to promote to the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found one another

out, they combine” (1835/2000, p. 109). What de Tocqueville found remarkable about American democracy was that, in the words of Peter Frumkin (2005), “America’s social and political system created a situation in which individuals could—in unprecedented numbers—form associations and take care of their own communities” (p. 37).

The U.S.’s modern-day image of nonprofit and voluntary sector activity is also anchored in religious traditions. Many of the functions associated with NPOs are in the fields of health care, social services, the arts, and education. James Douglas (1987) and Thomas Jeavons (1992) point out that, at the time of the country’s founding, these charitable activities would traditionally fall under the responsibility of the church. Due to the lack of a state-supported religion, government involvement in philanthropic work was regarded with suspicion. This suspicion was significant in establishing the generally accepted premise that the NPVS in the United States would (and should) exist primarily to “give expression to social, philosophical, moral, or religious values” (Jeavons, 1992, pp. 403-404). Although, as Robert Wuthnow (1991a) warns, such “symbols of the ‘good’ are always on the edge of a threatening abyss” (p. 244), as we shall soon see.

The world has changed since de Tocqueville’s time; of that there can be no doubt. What those changes have wrought in the nonprofit and voluntary sector is a much more complicated question. Today, for-profit businesses commonly lay claim to social responsibility and nonprofits talk about branding. Kuttner (1997) describes the confusion:

Non-profit institutions find themselves behaving more and more like for-profits...To exquisitely complete the circle, the defensive imitation of for-profits by nonprofits then allows the big chains to argue that nonprofits are really not so different at all. Why, Columbia/HCA repeatedly asks in its public-relations materials, should nonprofits get *special treatment*? [emphasis added] (p. 131)

The challenge to the nonprofit sector's previously potent claim to "special treatment" extends beyond its tax privilege. What is called into question here is the continued ability of modern nonprofit organizations to collectively represent the nation's most cherished socio-democratic values.

In what follows, I unravel a series of questions regarding what happens when traditional values, such as the ones historically embodied by nonprofits, lose their "sanctioning context" (Merelman, 1966). Questions such as:

- What values are expressed and sustained in the modern nonprofit and voluntary sector?
- How do the complex financial, institutional, and cultural forces that impinge upon contemporary nonprofits reshape the presentation of values?
- And, finally, if these groups do, indeed, reflect the values of American citizens, what interpretive conclusions might be drawn about society writ-large?

In the course of this investigation, I found that NPOs have lost their presumptive ideological privilege because of the constant strain between market and societal values. To justify this claim, however, it is necessary to look at NPOs in a historical context, briefly detail the turbulent current environment, and establish my heuristic frames—the societal and market value orientations. Only after considering these conceptual issues can one begin to understand such a fall from grace.

THE HALO OF IDEOLOGICAL PRIVILEGE

The nonprofit and voluntary sector has always been known by what it is not. Writing of this paradox, Michael O'Neill (2002) makes the eloquent analogy to Michelangelo's fabled response when asked, "How do you sculpt a horse from a block of

marble?” The Italian artist’s reply was “by chipping away at everything that is not a horse” (p. 2). So, too, the public understanding of American nonprofits is premised on the negative (not-for-profit). More accurately, it is a unique combination of *association* and *disassociation* that made these groups ideologically distinctive.

Historically, nonprofits were portrayed as separate from both the market (“nonprofit”) and government (“and voluntary”). *As separate from the market*, NPOs are neither expected to make a profit nor are they accountable to owners. Thus, they have been positioned as exempt from the control of free-market pricing conditions that determine value in terms of economic exchange. *As separate from the state*, nonprofits are associated with the exercise of individual initiative and voluntary behavior and distanced from government, which relies on coercion to gain compliance (Parsons, 1971).

In the new republic, the separation of church and state was also important in the development of a distinctive NPVS (Hammack, 1995). Several scholars interpret the very existence of a voluntary sector as a response to limited government under the constitution (Curti, 1956-1957). “In effect,” writes David Hammack (1995), “nonprofit organizations became the instruments through which Americans put into action their First Amendment rights” (p. 131). Thus, NPOs symbolized a restricted government and the widest possible expression of religious views and beliefs.

As it was separated from government and the market, the NPVS was simultaneously *associated with moral principle*. Because social welfare came to be regarded as laden with moral values, private, voluntary action was constructed as superior to government intervention. NPOs could provide the “personalized moral suasion” that the government could not and, as a result, religious piety was a prime inducement for participation (Salamon, 1997, p. 286). The Puritan doctrine of communalism also played a large role in the historical association of NPOs with religion. In the words of John

Winthrop, a Puritan leader instrumental in founding the Massachusetts Bay Colony, this biblical tradition held that: “we must delight in each other, make other’s conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together: always have before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body” (as cited in Wuthnow, 1991a, p. 9). Thus, from the very beginning of the founding of the United States, Puritan philosophical roots provided a utopian flair to NPOs (Bellah et al., 1996).

Richard Bush (1992) writes that early NPOs were run “in a manner best characterized as spiritual and religious fervor, evangelical hope, and deep faith that commitment to mission would preserve the organization in good times and bad” (p. 391). As a rhetorical vision Puritanism was, according to Ernest Bormann (1985), “designed to revivify and sustain the group consciousness. The high standards of community and personal conduct were such that mortal man was unlikely to achieve them, and thus the Puritans felt the need for continual reform of individual and community behavior” (p. 52). The connection between religion, social change, and voluntary association persisted at least until the Civil Rights Movement, during which many nonprofit organizations drew power from transcendent propositions of moral conscience (Heclo, 1996). In sum, religion has always been perceived as the rightful godmother of voluntary association (O'Neill, 1989).

Reading the history of nonprofit organizations as a symbolic process of association and disassociation sheds light on the ideological privilege that characterized the sector. Interpreted thusly, nonprofit organizations historically have been constructed as being disassociated from both the state and the market and, by implication, this distancing made way for nonprofits to be associated with higher moral principle. As a result of this symbolic maneuver, I argue, NPOs became *identified with* a privileged

ideology. The nonprofit and voluntary sector, then, has traditionally been a “special, set-apart place,” enshrined in the pantheon of American symbols as representing what is best about the nation (Hart, 1999, p. 92; Salamon, 1997).

CHALLENGES TO THE CONTINUED GLOW

As of late, however, NPOs have been thrust into a more competitive social system. Immense, large-scale changes have interpenetrated the sector and exerted pressure on nonprofits to adapt to a new world. Such processes can be particularly painful for groups that position themselves as different from (or superior to) the outside world, as Roderick Hart (1984) and George Cheney (1995) both demonstrate. Detailed descriptions of these sources of interpenetration are offered in subsequent chapters, but a brief overview of the financial, institutional, and cultural forces impinging on NPOs is merited.

Financial

Since the 1980's, NPOs have witnessed major fiscal shifts in the: (1) source of revenue, (2) form of funding, and (3) overall amount of money available. In the past, nonprofits received a majority of their funding from individual sources. Therefore, their long-term survival depended on developing and sustaining relationships with core constituencies (Backman & Smith, 2000; Brown, Susan, Turner, & Prince, 2000). Currently, individual giving as a *source of revenue* for NPOs is in decline. Overall, as a share of personal income, giving rates have receded since the 1970's and government and foundations have picked up the tab (Salamon, 2003). The prominence of institutional, as opposed to private, giving has had important repercussions. For instance, when the “reinventing government” movement took Washington by storm, federal health and human service agencies *altered the form* of government support to nonprofits from grants

to competitive contracting. Implementing the vision of Osborn and Grabler (1991) meant that government should now shop around the private sector, find the most efficient provider (either for profit or nonprofit), and then enter into a contractual relationship for service provision. One consequence of this change was that NPOs were expected to adhere to new performance measures. Perhaps the biggest consequence for nonprofits, however, was that it attracted a slew of for-profit companies into the field of social service provision (Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000; Ryan, 1999).

Finally, the *amount and availability* of funds has decreased. Nonprofits have not been immune to the overall financial crisis plaguing the U.S. economy. In particular, government is now undergoing a period of major retrenchment and federal and state legislatures have, therefore, slashed discretionary spending (Salamon, 2004; Ekinberry & Kluver, 2004). This reduction in discretionary spending results in diminished funding to the NPOs providing social services on behalf of the government. Many NPOs supplement the lost revenue by engaging in commercial activities (Dees & Anderson, 2004; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). The conventional hypothesis is that nonprofits reluctantly participate in such ventures but Estelle James (James, 1986, 2004) finds that some nonprofits embrace the idea of marketization. In particular, James singles out universities and hospitals. However, Angela Eikenberry (2009) points out that other examples abound, such as the celebrity spectacle of the product (RED) campaign or the Susan G. Komen Foundation's pink ribbon campaign (the latter is attended to in chapter three).

NPOs now operate in an environment of constant financial pressure and fee-for-service programs are only the tip of the iceberg (Minkoff & Powell, 2006). Competing for dollars in crowded field (not to mention funding requirements) forces many NPOs to provide performance data as evidence that they are trustworthy. This type of proof

represents a sharp shift from past accountability standards. Peter Dobkin Hall (2001) captures this break:

Traditionally, small nonprofits reflected the interests of members, donors, and charismatic amateurs capable of mobilizing the resources of communities of interest. To the extent that nonprofessional management of these organizations was accountable to anyone, it was only to the individuals who composed them. The activities of the organization, whether of good, bad, or middling quality, were really of concern to no one else. (p. 96)

Changes to the type, form, and amount of funding have made empirical accountability the norm. Yet not everything that “counts” can be measured, as the saying goes. In chapter four, titled Trust: People or Productivity, I address aspects of the NPVS that defy measurement and examine the conclusion that the increased reliance on metrics may actually tell us less about the nonprofit and voluntary sector, rather than more.

Institutional

The long-term impact of the current financial squeeze is uncertain; scholars cannot predict whether it will end up being a golden opportunity or a disabling constraint for nonprofit organizations. More certain is the fact that increased competition has spurred professionalization and growth in the nonprofit and voluntary sector. Increasingly, NPOs hire paid staff and, as a result, a gradual replacement of the volunteer workforce is underway (Minkoff & Powell, 2006). Frumkin (2004) locates the demand for *professionals* who specialize in grants, leadership, and management amidst the adoption of sophisticated government and foundation funding models that require the application of technical expertise. The need to develop and exchange such knowledge has led to the recent recognition of nonprofit management as an academic field (Hall, 1992). The growing awareness of nonprofit professionals as an organizational sector is of particular importance. The theory of neo-institutionalism holds that individual

organizations are subject to the “accumulated expectations” of the field as a whole (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Taken from this perspective, professionalization accelerates and magnifies all the forces impinging on nonprofits. As such, professionalization is a subject dealt with at length in chapter four of this dissertation.

Increased competition did not only occur from decreased resources. During this same timeframe, the sheer *number of organizations* in the NPVS has grown tremendously. To date, there are over one-and-a half million registered nonprofits and this number is only getting bigger. Giving USA (*Annual report*, 2006) reports that 97 NPOs are created each day in the United States for a grand total of around 35,000 organizations per year. Heterogeneity and extraordinary diversity characterizes these groups (Pallotta, 2008). For example, in 2009, The New York Times reported that the I.R.S. approved applications for tax-exempt status filed by groups to:

ensure a ‘chemical free’ graduation party at a high school in Monticello, Minn.; two donkey-rescue operations, and two new chapters of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group of cross-dressing ‘nuns’ who recently raised more than \$25,000 for AIDS treatment and other causes with an event featuring a live S-and-M show. (Strom, 2009, December 6)

There is, indeed, an organization to suit the taste (or lack of taste) of each individual.

Cultural

From the perspective of cultural commentators, the statement above reflects a modern American obsession with individualism. Theorists, such as Allen Ehrenhalt, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Fname Angus and Fname Jhally observe that contemporary life is marked by: (1) hyper-personalization, (2) commodification, and (3) alienation. Ehrenhalt (1995) posits that the consumerist ability to “choose” has eroded common standards and brought a world in which “nothing we choose seems good enough to be permanent” (p. 9). Of such *hyper-personal pursuits*, Elshtain (1998) writes, “We have become so

entranced by the notion that the self is merely the sum total of a person's choices that we have lost any moral framework for evaluating those choices" (p. 9). What both Ehrenhalt and Elshtain lament is the conquering of all aspects of our lives by *commodification*. In particular, it is the intrusion of capitalism into "areas of society where there may still exist alternative social visions" that concerns Angus and Jhally (1989, p. 81), among others.

Ultimately, the colonization of the private life-world and the removal of uncontested truths, declares the postmodernist, breeds *alienation*. Evidence to this effect can be found in a multitude of surveys showing that trust in institutions, including nonprofit organizations, is remarkably low. Among the findings is that "most Americans believe non-profit organizations and charities are not financially efficient enough in their work" and that "nearly one out of three respondents expressed little or no confidence in charitable groups" (Ellison, 2008; Brookings Institution, 2004; as cited in Pallotta, 2008, p. 4). The real significance of the cultural trends briefly touched on above is the inability for any institution to "authoritatively pronounce on matters of value" (Brown, et al., 2000, p. 50). Cynicism, consumerism, and the breakdown of grand narratives have all had an extraordinary impact on the NPVS. The omnipotence of consumerism is a major threat to the identity of NPOs. In chapter three I address the topic of identity in detail and, in chapter six, I examine the expression of mission in the NPVS and explain why today's nonprofits are not yet living up to their potential as sites of resistance to these trends.

SOCIETAL VERSUS MARKET VALUE ORIENTATIONS

Taken together, the NPVS is under mounting pressure from a complex interplay of structural and cultural forces. As a result, practitioners and scholars are asked to

consider: “How should nonprofit organizations adapt to an increasingly competitive environment?” Judging by the titles of few recent books targeted at NPOs such as Durham’s (2009) Brandraising, Lynch and Wall’s (2009) Mission, Inc.: The Practitioners’ Guide to Social Enterprise (2009), and Rasler’s (2009) ROI For Nonprofits: The New Key to Sustainability, it seems clear that a popular response is, “Nonprofit organizations should act more like for-profit business.” This question, and the answer that I suggested here, position values at the center of a lively debate. I argue that even a cursory review of common terms in NPVS theory—e.g. instrumental and expressive functions, distinctiveness and survival imperatives, civil society, sector blurring/bending, and social entrepreneurship—reveals implicit value preferences. For scholars studying values in organizational settings, a basic assumption, as stated by George Cheney and Greg Frenette (1993), is that: “the establishment and maintenance of a set of value premises...serves as a resource for large and small argumentative efforts” (p. 51). These claims are, in and of themselves, powerful persuaders. Yet nowhere in the NPVS literature could I find a comprehensive treatment of the values underlying the arguments in this debate. Below, I provide a preliminary step in that direction.

In a more systematic review of relevant scholarly writing on the NPVS, I followed Ashcraft’s (2008) recommendation and read “with an eye for tacit depictions” of values (p. 275). Two prevailing interpretations were readily apparent—a *societal value orientation* and a *market value orientation*. As a matter of clarification, I used the term “value” broadly, employing Amitai Etzioni’s (1988) definition of values as “overarching criteria people use to make choices” (p. 105). I also acknowledge, as Karen Ashcraft (2008) does, that all attempts at categorization inevitably result in some reduction of complexity. Nonetheless, I share her hope that what these orientations may lack in

complexity, they compensate for in heuristic provocativeness. In setting up this conceptual framework, I depend on three critical propositions:

1). The societal and market orientations are both value-laden.

When reviewing the NPVS literature I was surprised to find that, for the most part, values were overtly addressed only when discussed in the context of what I identify here as the societal value orientation. Conversely, the group of values which I labeled as market-oriented were more likely to remain implicit. In the NPVS literature a general assumption exists holding that only “economically passive” nonprofits have or represent values (Keane, 1998). The discourse regarding the business or the market practices of NPOs, even though it, too invoked values, was typically not framed as such. This tendency may reflect the potency of the market’s claim to rationality. Because rationality resonates so strongly with social science, researchers may have overlooked that they were in the context of values. However, there is no such thing as a neutral designator (Keough & Lake, 1993).

2). Values are linked.

The values for individuals, social relationships, and organizations are closely linked (Alexander & Smith, 1993). I chose to highlight their connected nature with the label “orientation,” which I adapted from Cheney and Frenette’s (1993) description of value logics as: “overarching or superordinate value premises to which subordinate or subsidiary values are connected or contributory” (p.55). Such linkages are not always explicit, however. Oftentimes, invoking a single value will be enough to call forth an entire set of shared values.

3). Values can, and often do, conflict.

When NPOs are involved in reasoning about ethical organizational operations, for example, competing claims can be manifested. Nonprofits with a societal value

orientation, for instance, might ask: “What is right, not what is legal” (Hodgkin, 1993). As this question appeals to moral principle, it is a very different question than “Is this the best way to get things done?” The second, more market-oriented logic, appeals to pragmatism. The values of societal and market orientations will conflict if the “right” thing to do is inefficient and much of the literature on social service delivery in the NPVS can be interpreted from this perspective.

Each of these propositions is demonstrated below. In what follows, I describe the societal value orientation and the market value orientation, offering basic assumptions about the use of values to shape how individuals, social relationships, and organizational operation are understood and provide illustrative literature.

Individuals

The societal and market value orientations provide dramatically different interpretations of individual actors and their motivation. Societal actors are constructed as being altruistic, caring, other-regarding, unique, and as giving freely of their time and resources (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Wilson, 2000). These qualities are the very essence of non-rational behavior; therefore, individual behavior “transcends,” or “eludes” prediction (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Wuthnow, 1991a; Brown et al., 2000). Societally-minded individuals act out of a sense of responsibility, obligation, or duty and are motivated by transcendental appeals, for example, to “Our better nature” and “the existence of social and moral obligations that exist independent of the individual and operate on him” (Eberly, 1998, p. 25). Valued knowledge is derived from experience and is often gained through voluntary participation (Putnam, 2000; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). In such a system, the ultimate expression of the individual is the citizen (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1996; Eberly & Streeter, 2002).

In contrast, the market-oriented actor is praised for rationality. In a system that features rational actors, technical expertise is privileged (Brainard & Siplon, 2004). Actors exercise their right to “choose” in a wide-variety of contexts such as, volunteer activities, incentives, and in the provision and receipt of social services. Although the individual chooses, aggregate choices can be predicted (Bennett, 2005; Tam, 1998). Personal material gain is a key motive, so it makes sense that the market-oriented system invokes self-interest as the “best” way to pursue the common good (Pallotta, 2008). In this context, the ultimate actor is the social entrepreneur who embodies success and innovation (Bornstein, 2007; Frumkin, 2004). Table 1.1 provides a comparison of the societal value orientation to the market value orientation, identifying the characteristics of individuals that are preferable in each orientation.

	Societal Value Orientation	Market Value Orientation
Individuals are...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Altruistic • Unique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rational • Individuals can be predicted
Motivated by appeals to...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcendent principle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal gain
Knowledge represented by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyday (lived) experience • Learned through participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized knowledge • “Experts”
Key figure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneur

Table 1.1 Individual values

Social relationships

Accompanying the discourse on individual values in the NPVS literature was a set of related assumptions regarding social relationships. In an example I identified as

belonging to the “societal orientation,” a key value of relationships, “cooperation,” was premised by linking it to a valued individual trait:

Nonprofits may be more capable than government or market organizations of generating social norms of trust, *cooperation*, and mutual support due to their non-coercive character *appeals to charitable and social motives* [emphasis added]. (Backman & Smith, 2000, p. 362)

Thus, values, such as trust, cooperation, and mutual support, are grouped together to form understanding.

At the root, relationships in the societal value orientation are essentially understood as cooperative (Bush, 1992; Weiner, 1982). The use of labels such as “Commons,” “Civil Society,” and “Communitarianism” invoke the value of cooperation. The portrayal of social relationships emphasizes mutuality, interdependence, and trust (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000; Van Til, 2000; Walzer, 1995). Not surprisingly, the societal value orientation favors interaction involving more than two people and elevates terms that imply multiple actors such as “network” and “social ecology” (Bellah, et al., 1996; Mason, 1996; Pratt, 2001). Because individuals in the societal orientation are endowed with the qualities of altruism, duty, and obligation, it follows that community good be placed above personal good. When this concept is stated in terms of political philosophy, it is called civic republicanism (Ekinberry, 2009). As such, the societal orientation stands for the communal dimension of the American character (Bellah, et al., 1996). The most appropriate metaphor for social relationships in this system is the covenant (Eberly, 1998; Ethics Commission of the Independent sector, 1990; Liao, Foreman, & Sargeant, 2001; Mason, 1996; Van Til, 2000). Symbolically, a covenant represents parties that are bound together in close communion, implies obligations that are extra-legal, and suggests a long-term temporal frame.

In contrast, the most fitting metaphor for social relationships in the context of market orientation is that of the contract (Bennett, 2005; Mason, 1996). The contract metaphor is particularly provocative because it is both a way of interpreting relationships and a way of performing charitable work. In other words, “contract” presents an interesting conundrum for NPOs: Which came first, contracts as a way of seeing relationships, or the literal shift to social service contracting as a funding source? This conundrum foreshadows the changing nature of the NPVS.

As a metaphor for understanding, “contract” symbolizes the transactional nature of social relationships (for instance, attorneys that specialize in contracts are called transactional lawyers). Entering into a contract is, typically, the result of choice and parties must uphold the responsibilities that are expressed in the document but are not obligated to go beyond the bounds of the agreement. Contracts, then, represent the type of limited engagement that is called for by individualism (Bellah, et al., 1996; Wuthnow, 1991a)

Only a competitive environment necessitates that individual rights be protected. Thus, the market orientation fundamentally understands human relationships as competitive. Competition is, in fact, the driving force of this system; competition is both valued as a part of human nature and as a desirable end (Cheney and Frenette, 1993; Sanger, 2001; Bornstein, 2007). Expressed as political philosophy, the market orientation closely resembles liberalism (Boyte, 1989; Eikenberry, 2009; Etzioni, 1993). Table 1.2 summarizes the comparisons of societal and market value orientations by the dimensions just discussed.

	Societal Value Orientation	Market Value Orientation
Human nature is essentially...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive

Dimension of American character represented...	• Communalism	• Individualism
Guiding metaphor...	• Covenant	• Contract

Table 1.2 Values in social relationships

Organizational operations

How the virtues of individuals and social relationships are constructed implies values that guide organizational operations. Therefore, organizational values seem “natural” (Alexander & Smith, 1993). In the market orientation, for example, positing rational, predictive individuals in competitive relationships is how managerial pragmatism becomes a valued way of operating (Brinckerhoff, 2000; Gies, Ott, & Shafritz, 1990). In other words, the vast array of literature that promotes general management principles in NPOs implicitly argues that nonprofit and for-profit business organizations both value efficient responses to market demands and that the demands of individuals in the market can be predicted (Anthony & Young, 1990; Gies, et al., 1990; Gonzalez, Vijande, & Casielles, 2002; Hansmann, 1987; Weisbrod, 1998). A market orientation, then, can be said to prioritize external considerations (e.g. funders and the customer/client) as a means of ultimately becoming self-sustaining and ensuring the organization’s long-term survival (Ebrahim, 2003; Knutsen & Brower, 2010).

In the societal value orientation, however, the characterization of individuals and social relationships calls forth a different set of shared assumptions regarding how NPOs ought to operate. When citizens prize cooperative relationships, it becomes a matter of “common sense” to emphasize the unique role NPOs play in American democracy and to implement internal organizational structure that are democratic (P. L. Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Van Til, 2000). Such an organization would also be opposed to setting specific goals tied to performance measures, commonly thought of as a

“best” practice in market oriented NPOs (Dart, 2004). To do so implies that an NPO is consciously operating in its own benefit. These activities violate the shared belief of the societal organization that needs or demands cannot be pre-determined since each individual is unique (Douglas, 1987; Rose-Ackerman, 1996). Instead, these groups operate on intangibles (Forbes, 1998; Mason, 1996). Remaining both dependent on the community and distinct from other groups become the primary organizational values for a societal NPO (Schlesinger & Gray, 2002). Table 1.3 lists a review of organizational values for both orientations.

	Societal Value Orientation	Market Value Orientation
Key principle...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managerial pragmatism
Ethics is determined by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What is right, not what is legal.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Is this the best way to get this done?”
Action deriving from...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneity • Spirit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Application of management practices (efficiency/expediency)
Faith placed in...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intangibles • “Idea” of the public good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tangible outcomes • Demand produces a diversity of solutions
“Answers” to...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal (organizational democracy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External (principle/agent theory)
Organizational imperative...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain distinctiveness • Dependence on community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survival • Self-sustaining

Table 1.3 Values guiding organizational operation

Taken together, the societal value orientation and the market value orientation closely parallel the utopian and the pragmatic/persuasive traditions in American

discourse. These rhetorical themes can be traced back to their origins in “the ‘prophetic-utopian’ strains of colonial religion” and “the rugged mercantilism that motivated the nation’s earliest settlers” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 243). Hart points to Carroll Arnold’s observation that this struggle between doing the “will of God” and the doing the business of business has been part of every major American debate (as cited in Hart, 2005, p. 243). It is possible that the impinging forces I described earlier have re-animated an old struggle in a new context. Given that the societal value orientation and the market orientation are both drawn from the same well of deeply held American values, they are, indeed, worthy competitors. This dissertation examines the competition with an eye to seeing which orientation is prevalent within the modern NPVS.

CONCLUSION

As the introduction to this chapter indicated, NPOs are a crucial contributor to the American way of life (Salamon, 2003). Public discourse about nonprofits, claims Wuthnow (1991b), inevitably signals our collective values. He believes that examining nonprofit organizations reveals the answers to penetrating questions such as “What is our vision of the good, our priorities, where do we locate our hope?” (p. 22). My project is deeply indebted to Robert Wuthnow’s work in the nonprofit and voluntary sector. In particular, his masterful book, Acts of Compassion, inspired this project’s focus on the metaphorical and symbolic quality of nonprofits.

George Cheney’s (1999) Values at Work is another important influence. In this book, Cheney asks, “To what extent is it possible for a business to maintain a core of social values—such as participatory democracy—while growing, becoming more complex, and being financially successful?” (p. ix). In this dissertation, I try to reverse that question: To what extent can an organization traditionally charged with social aims

become more businesslike without losing its core of social values? In engaging this question in the chapters that follow, I re-tell the story of an age-old tension in a new and important setting, a setting that has been central to American life since the nation's founding.

Chapter 2: Studying NPOs: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

“The voluntary sector is an environment of words.”

--David Mason

INTRODUCTION

The core of my dissertation examines the tension between a societal and a market value orientation in the nonprofit and voluntary sector. In chapter one, I suggested that powerful financial, institutional, and cultural forces are moving nonprofit organizations into a more competitive social system. While social scientists readily acknowledge this shift, they have just begun to interpret the intrusion of market practices and principles into the sector's value system. Instead, with a few notable exceptions (Bellah, et al., 1996; Bush, 1992; Ekinberry, 2009; Wuthnow, 1991a), researchers have tended to exhibit a “charitable values fallacy,” the idea that only when nonprofits are economically passive do they embody values. Raymond Dart (2004) perpetuates the conceptual distinction between NPOs being *either* values-based *or* market-driven. He writes:

From this basic characterization, nonprofit is understood to be organized around an interconnected nest of prosocial and voluntaristic values and goals with few references to the means and structures by which these values are enacted. Business-like activities are generally understood to be those characterized by some blend of profit motivation, the use of managerial and organizational design tools developed in for-profit business settings, and broadly framed business thinking to structure and organize activity. (p. 294)

Thus, as illustrated in the above passage, although research on the “values” of nonprofits may be extensive, it remains, paradoxically, limited.

That there are *two competing* value orientations vying for dominance in modern NPOs, then, tends to be something of a hidden reality. Throughout this study, however, I demonstrate not only the existence of these dueling systems but also the conflict's impact

on the public perception of the nonprofit and voluntary sector. Before expounding on that, however, I must pause to (1) understand how others have attempted to study values in the nonprofit and voluntary sector and (2) clarify my approach to the topic.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Language, culture, and the social construction of values

Certainly, I am not the first to observe that current research efforts fail to represent the entire landscape of values in the NPVS (J. Rothschild & Milofsky, 2006). But what specific constraints explain such a restricted perspective? To begin, most existing research assumes that values reside within individuals. Values are “ghostly essences” inside of people’s heads, unobservable except indirectly through surveys (Billig, 2010, p. 210). A sizeable amount of the literature on nonprofits and volunteer values is in this social psychological tradition. As such, scholars pay a great deal of attention to gathering and analyzing self-report data in an attempt to establish a one-to-one relationship between people’s values and altruistic behavior (Dekker & Halman, 2003; Musick & Wilson, 2008). An “individualist” approach also pervades studies that investigate values as motives behind voluntary action. Even the masterful works of Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler and Tipton (1996) and Wuthnow (1991a) fall into this category. In their efforts to explore individualism and community in the American NPVS, these authors overlook how volunteers learn and refine motives through communication. Of Wuthnow’s respondents in *Acts of Compassion*, Allahyari (2000) wonders, “How much were they influenced by the moral rhetoric of charitable action available to them through their volunteer activities?” (p. 3).

Prior research also ignores the corporate voice of NPOs. Although a wide variety of academics might now be comfortable acknowledging that organizations do, in fact,

“speak” as a whole (Cheney & McMillan, 1990; Crable, 1990), reservations about studying them as such persist. Corporate entities, unlike individuals, will never be able to take part in empirical activities like filling out a survey, joining a focus group, nor can they participate in an experiment. By no means, however, is this epistemological assumption restricted to NPVS research. Even in the sub-field of organizational communication, there has been a strong tendency among scholars and practitioners to isolate and identify messages with individual sources (Cheney & McMillan, 1990).

Undoubtedly, research using social psychology methodology makes an important contribution to the understanding of values and behavior. Yet such an individualist interpretation ignores two important dynamics: (1) values are created *between* people—in communication not isolation; and (2) organizations contribute to the conversation. In other words, collectives not only reflect the values of individuals or society but shape them as well.

An alternative approach is that values can be directly observed through language, although meanings are not inside an isolated individual’s head; even dictionaries do not tell us what language *means*. Social situations and human beings who think and act define meanings (Edelman, 1988). Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin (1973), for instance, was deeply skeptical of studies that focus on “inner states” of being. Instead, he believed that values are located “entirely and completely without—in the words, the gesture, the act. There is nothing left unexpressed in it, nothing inner about it—it is wholly on the outside, wholly brought out in exchanges” (p. 19). What Bakhtin suggested is that if one wishes to study values, utterances are the best place to look. Values are discursive accomplishments and, unless articulated, they have no power (Broadfoot, Deetz, & Anderson, 2008). Michael Calvin McGee’s (1980) classic example of equality demonstrates this point: “No one has ever seen an ‘equality’ strutting up the driveway, so

if equality exists at all, it has meaning through application” (p. 10). Social constructionism, therefore, supports the view that values and communication are inseparable (Hart, 1984).

Communication not only shapes the first-order impressions of human beings (e.g. how we learn what a “table” or “tree” means) but it has a role in constructing social practices and social reality as well (Broadfoot, Deetz, & Anderson, 2008). Berger and Luckmann (1966) were among the first to note that language makes things “real” for individuals and, at the same time, typifies these meanings, creating “conditioned (rather than universal) rationalities as widespread ways of thinking within particular social systems” (p. 55). One of the great insights from Wittgenstein, suggests Billig (2010), was to claim that the same process occurs when we use psychological terms such as “remember.” For instance, children learn to use the phrase “I remember” just as they learn what “table” or “chair” means. Importantly, they can also be corrected if their usage is incorrect (p. 211). Edelman (1971) points out that this process often occurs “in ways we do not consciously experience and so are nonobvious” (p. 67). One can sense the “nonobvious” ways that language shapes understanding in a study conducted by Edwards and Middleton (1988). Billig (2010) summarizes their work thusly:

Edwards and Middleton observed mothers looking at photo albums with their young children. As they talked the mothers were telling their children about memory. Not only were they recalling the events of the past, and providing memory-stories for the children to repeat, but they were also communicating the sorts of things that should be remembered or considered memorable. (p. 213)

If asked to provide a similar synopsis on Edwards and Middleton’s research, I might have stated that children were really being taught what sorts of things *ought* to be remembered. Even though these authors do not explicitly make this connection, I propose that this represents the process of acquiring a set of values. Put differently, what

Wittgenstein (1953), Billig (2010), and Edwards and Middleton (1988) all suggest is this: if a society does not learn something communicatively, that something will no longer be able to be performed. If we apply this principle to the discursive practices of nonprofit organizations, suddenly the stakes become higher. In a very real sense, the messages sent by NPOs instruct the public on what the sector ought to value. Even more importantly, if these groups stop repeating messages featuring traditional, societal values and highlight market values instead, the public would no longer be able to perform one set of values (societal) because it has been displaced by another (market). Herein lies the essence of my claim that NPOs may have lost their presumptive ideological privilege.

From the social constructionists' perspective, language is symbolic action and, as I have shown above, "to *say* something is to *do* something" (Austin, 1962, p. 94). To talk is to create social reality and, for the critic, looking at language provides a crucial clue to the view of reality at that time (Edelman, 1988). Therefore, discourse is an inherently rich site for observing values. I advocate, then, taking the "linguistic turn" made by students of language in the twentieth century (Edelman, 1988).

Functional fetishism also constrains scholarship. The standard espoused purpose of most research on values in nonprofits is aimed at improving organizational outcomes. Far too many scholars offer a limited understanding of values as merely one-directional tools for management to increase either the number of donors or the level of volunteer and staff commitment. The leadership literature, in particular, is rife with suggestions for "harnessing" and "managing" values (see Frumkin, 2002 for a summary).

Not surprisingly, most of the research on market values takes place in the for-profit sector. There are, however, a limited number of studies that expressly attempt to examine NPOs. For those that do that, values are considered "an elective business strategy" and empirical measurement (typically involving some variant of the MKTOR

scale) seeks to prove that a direct, positive relationship exists between possessing a market orientation and increasing organizational performance (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Such research is too microscopic for my purposes. Researchers following this path rarely gather data in a wide variety of nonprofits, nor do they go beyond self-described behavior to consider the perceptions of members regarding the NPO or its market orientation (Gainer & Padanyi, 2002; Padanyi, 2008). That is, they offer little insight into organizations as entities embedded in social, economic, and political systems.

To account for these deficits, I suggest inviting neo-institutional theorists and those who study organizational culture to the table. Weaving these theories into my analysis allows me to account for the importance of the external forces influencing the nonprofit sector's for-profit values.

Neo-institutionalism has been widely used to explain the importance of the external environment in internal organizational dynamics (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Nonprofit organizations are, according to Suzanne Feeney (1997), best understood in the context of communities, political structures, cultures, industries or other coordinative fields of organization. In particular, Feeney (1997) identifies five distinct advantages to applying this interpretive framework in the NPVS:

(a) seeing the organization as existing in a social system, (b) seeking out and analyzing cultural influences that shape organizational behavior, (c) acknowledging that a variety of constituencies are likely to be important and powerful, (d) discovering that coercive influences often shape nonprofits, and (e) realizing that organizations operate...within horizontal and vertical interorganizational networks. (p. 491)

I share a normative concern with neo-institutionalists over the “migration” of outside values into organizations. I diverge from this group, however, in my attempt to present these forces in tension, to show how NPOs must be simultaneously open to external

forces and yet retain a measure of what makes them axiologically distinct (Cheney, 1999).

Broadly stated, organizational culture theorists such as Stanley Deetz (1992) and Cheney (1995) connect local cultures (an organization) and communities (external forces) through the construct of identity and identification (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). These researchers are interested in finding out how certain organizations can provide an enhanced sense of identification and support. Eric Eisenberg and Patricia Riley (2001) write that:

dehumanizing, hierarchical, gendered discursive practices in organizations are indicative of a breakdown in community. As these practices are reproduced elsewhere in our lives, we need to recognize their wider power in society. Communication is at the forefront of this discussion because of its integral role in the structuring of both organizations and community. (p. 313)

Investigating how the communicative practices of nonprofit organizations differ (or do not differ) from for-profit entities is, then, a crucial concern.

A cultural lens can also soften some of the radical premises of social construction. Dennis Mumby and Robin Clair (1997) observe:

Organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are “nothing but” discourse, but rather that discourse is the principle means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are. (p. 182-183)

Like social constructionists, scholars of organizational culture clearly maintain that values are created in language and, by the same token, discursive patterns in organizations “do not just describe things; they do things” (J. Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 6). Yet meaning is not located entirely within a supremely sovereign individual; instead, it is seen as “partly a product of tradition and partly the synthesis of people’s symbolizing powers” (Alvesson, 2008, pp. 317-318). Because I want to explore

traditional, historically situated, and taken-for-granted (therefore, shared) premises about nonprofit and voluntary action in tension with other deeply held market value premises, it seems appropriate to include, and abide, by this supposition.

Taken together, these considerations led me to propose a theoretical model that examines values as:

- Constructed through language
- Reflected, maintained, and shaped by organizations
- Embedded in social systems

Given these theoretical assumptions, I adopted a qualitative approach when collecting and analyzing my data.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A rhetorical approach

Specifically, a rhetorical methodology was best suited for the current project. There are a number of reasons why this is a fitting approach. First, rhetoric enables one to fully appreciate the nuances and subtleties of organizational discourse that might elude a positivist methodology. Next, a rhetorical lens opens the critic's eyes to how a speaker and audience engage in the co-creation of meaning and furnishes a terminology for describing what one sees (warrants and enthymemes, for example). Moreover, because rhetoric provides a framework for considering the dual (and dueling) nature of language, scholars have long relied upon it when understanding messages as dialogic. In this spirit, for example, Peter Hamilton (1997) demonstrates that Protagoras' classic terms *logi* and *anti-logi* are applicable in a modern setting for identifying a dominant and a challenging discourse in management and labor disputes. Rhetorical analysis also made sense in this study because it is:

- *Versatile*. For instance, it can be (and has been) used to explore the situation, audience, and structural, and argumentative features in both “high” and “low” texts (Hart & Daughton, 2005; Heracleous, 2008).
- *Thrives in uncertainty*. By definition, rhetoric concerns matters that are contingent; it is persuasive when multiple possibilities and choices exist (Cheney, Christensen, Conrad, & Lair, 2008).
- *Sensitive to cultural change*. Insightful critics have documented the macro-effects of discourse, and discourses’ constructive effects on understanding by treating messages as symptoms of larger trends (Hart & Daughton, 2005).

Given the two-sided nature of my pursuit, the organizational uncertainty of nonprofit organizations, and my interest in culture, rhetorical inquiry was an attractive option. By engaging in an expressly rhetorical study, say Hart and Daughton (2005), the critic is able to produce general understanding by examining a limited number of texts. Because this method limits one’s scope, however, it is important to be an insightful sampler. To maximize my chances in that regard, careful consideration was given to selecting the cases and texts for study.

Which organizations?

Nonprofits as an object of study are nettlesome. In recognition of this truism, one need only be reminded of the considerable disagreement over labeling their activity (whether “nonprofit,” “independent,” or “charitable,” just to name a few). Lester Salmon (1997) serves as guide in this regard. He finds that each label offers an incomplete and partially accurate definition; however, he elects to use “nonprofit” because it is the most general and emphasizes the most basic feature of this set of organizations. I agree. I also employ Frumkin’s (2002) preferred term, “nonprofit and voluntary sector.” In a related

matter, researchers discuss which groups can be included in this category. Again, Salamon (1997) provides some direction, arguing that in the United States common usage includes not only charitable groups but also member-serving institutions. The case for including member-serving groups is also made by Lewis, Hamel and Richardson (2001), O'Neill and Young (1988), and Rudney (1987). I employ the typology of these researchers when separating NPOs into three categories:

- *Philanthropic*. “Those whose mission focuses on health, education, religion, cultural concerns, and social services.”
- *Advocacy*. “Promot[ing] social, economic, and/or political causes and include political parties, citizen groups, and lobbying groups among others.”
- *Mutual Benefit*. “Organizations such as chambers of commerce, professional associations, labor unions, and social clubs that exist for the benefit and interests of their members rather than the delivery of services to the public at large.” (Lewis, et al., 2001, p. 8)

Like Vanessa Beasely (2004), I do not dwell on a single organization in this study; instead, my goal is to paint a landscape inhabited by a diverse and rich sample. This is especially appropriate for nonprofits since the sector is plagued by a “horrendous lack of documentation” making any determination of a certain numerical universe impossible (Meyer, 1995, p. 211). Other characteristics influenced how I developed my sample of NPOs as well. In addition to the three typologies listed above, I also considered:

- Age
 - Emerging (less than 10 years old)
 - Established (more than 20 years old)

- Constituency
 - Organization should have a mix of volunteer and professional staff
- Funding source—organizations chosen should represent differing funding streams such as:
 - Government support
 - Private support
 - Fee for service

Groups meeting these criteria were identified in the searchable databases of the Encyclopedia of Associations (2009) and GuideStar. Obviously, this is not a random sample in the statistical sense but, again, my purpose was to assemble a group of cases that was broadly representative of the nonprofit and voluntary sector (e.g. the Cuban Numismatic Association and the Christian Community Service Center). Only in this way, Hart (1971, 2005) argues, is it possible to, even tentatively, tell a story larger than the sum of the groups represented. Table 2.1 offers a listing of the groups included for analysis.

Philanthropic	Advocacy	Mutual-Benefit
Christian Community Service Center	Women's City Club of New York	Austin Herb Society
Communities in Schools	Advocates for Self Government	Austin Chamber of Commerce
Susan G. Komen Foundation	Texas Public Interest Group	Cuban Numismatic Association
GENaustin	Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project	Nonprofit Technology Network

United Way Capital Area	Veterans for Peace	LBJ Future Forum
Family-to-Family	Free Press	
The Source	Voices of September 11th	
Alex's Lemonade Stand		
Homes for our Troops		

Table 2.1: The 21 organizations listed above were studied. These groups represented a myriad of services and programs across a wide range of sectors.

Why newsletters?

Each of the organizations listed above also regularly published a house organ such as a newsletter or monthly update. Typically, these documents were available for download in .pdf format on the group's website. Newsletters were chosen not because of their exceptional quality but just the opposite—because they are so exceedingly ordinary. While an important form of communication for nonprofits (M. M. Smith, 2007), as an artifact, newsletters have a mundane quality. In this sense, these communications certainly represent what Hart (1984) calls “quietly affirming moments of discourse” (p. 749).

Documents such as these are an attractive site for studying how NPOs talk about values when they are not expressly doing so and thus present the critic with a unique opportunity to read between the lines. In this sense, they are very different from, say, press releases, designed to respond to a specific crisis. While comparatively little work has been conducted on texts like corporate house organs, Cheney and Frenette (1993) observe, “these other cases [house organs] of written and spoken discourse most assuredly promote value premises, make arguments and attempt to persuade selected publics” (p. 55). Finally, newsletters address multiple audiences. Such texts, states

Lotman (1990), are forms of “auto-communication,” messages and meta-messages that confirm the organization to both internal and external audiences (see also Cheney & Christensen, 2001).

Having explained both my selection of organizations and texts, I should also comment on why I chose to limit the time frame of the study. The temporal scope of the analysis is limited to newsletters published after 2005. I elected a relatively short time span because I am essentially interested in the interplay of forces at the current moment (most forms of marketization, for instance, did not even begin to occur until after the 1990’s). I will, however, make some suggestions as to how the current moment compares with prior points in American history but will do so by relying on secondary sources. In part, this is also a pragmatic choice reflective of the fact that historical material (archives, reference books, journals) from nonprofit organizations is typically scarce (Myer, 1995).

To reaffirm and support my selection of organizations, text, and time, I compared them against recommendations made by Beyer and Lutze (1993) in their comprehensive study on methodological techniques in values research. These authors present three sets of measurement alternatives researchers face: type, domain, and time frame. Type is a question regarding the level of analysis (individual or shared; internalized, espoused, or enacted; and implicit or explicit). In this project, I examine shared values in NPOs, my theoretical assumptions leading me to believe that words *are* actions. As a result, I look at values as enacted by language and pay special attention to their implicit expressions in the newsletters. Domain asks the researcher to consider the level of specificity (universal to specific; distinct or fused). By looking at the values of American NPOs, I hope to comment on values that are specific to this culture and, in proposing that two value orientations characterize the NPVS, I affirm that values are, indeed, linked. Finally,

Beyer and Lutze offer three options for time frame (past, present, or future). My choice is consistent with their preference for a current time frame when observing values in texts.

In concluding this section, it should be stressed that rhetoric is both a hermeneutic and a practice (Hartelius & Browning, 2008). As a hermeneutic, rhetoric provides insight into the broad questions and central themes posed in chapter one. As a critical practice, rhetoric becomes a way of understanding texts in use. To use rhetoric in an analytical direction, I developed a set of rhetorical tools or critical probes. These probes are derived from well-established research in communication, organizational behavior, and nonprofit studies and allowed me to systematically review how value tensions brought on by institutional, economic, and cultural forces are manifested in language.

CRITICAL PROBES

Central to the research being proposed here is identifying how NPOs attempt to rhetorically preserve an expressive character when confronted by the organizational reality of *institutionalization*. Specifically, research concludes that most NPOs begin out of the human need for expression (Jeavons, 1992; Mason, 1996). Yet, a central tenet of organizational theory suggests that growth and sustainability require formation of formal organizational structures and may cause groups to be caught up in “the march of rationality” (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Cheney, 1995; Weber, 1968, p. 13). Identifying how NPOs rhetorically preserve an expressive nature when confronted with bureaucratic, legal-rational structure is of paramount importance. In investigating this question I ask:

- Are accounts of NPO activities framed by transcendental appeal? For example, what is the extent of nonliteral language? To what purpose is nonliteral language being employed? What are the preferred images? Do

organizations rely on more image-based or concept-based words? What stylistic devices are used to describe the organization and its activities?

- What are the guiding metaphors? Are metaphors drawn from family? Patriarchy or matriarchy? Religion? The marketplace? Machine or organic? Masculine or feminine? What is the cumulative effect of these metaphorical constructs?

In a related concern, the preservation of *immediacy*—NPOs as “people-sized” institutions—intrigues NPO researchers. Wuthnow (1991b) suggests that when groups get too large, they lose their personal touch. What can the rhetorical style tell us about how NPOs attempt to connect with audiences and maintain a sense of “belongingness” amidst an increasing individualized culture?

- How “personal” is the language used? Does the discourse have a social appeal? A “you” orientation—for instance, people as subjects, consistent use of clichés, 1st and 2nd person pronouns, adjectives, and active verbs?
- Or, in contrast, is the rhetoric characterized by what Gibson (1966) labels a detached, “stuffy” style—e.g. avoidance of simple words and reliance on professionally oriented code words, and use of the passive voice?

This points toward the next area of interest, *civic engagement*. Nonprofits are widely regarded as the spearhead of grass-roots democratization (Brown et al., 2000). Scholars theorize that the level of social capital, or civic trust, is related to the skills acquired by citizens through participation in these organizations (Putnam, 2000; Van Til, 2000; Verba, et al., 1995). Therefore, civic engagement is another key conversation regarding how NPOs are responding to cultural change. Detailing constructions of staff, volunteers, donors, and recipients may shed light on how NPOs create and manage expectations of organizational democracy.

- Which constituency, members, volunteers, staff, or recipients is the focus of attention? Do these depictions reflect the heterogeneity of the sector and the nation? How are distinctions made between members and nonmembers in discourse? Is the central status criterion external or is there an internal differentiation?
- To what extent does the NPO provide a voice to members? Is there a forum to convey personal feelings? An ability to communicate horizontally/laterally?
- What are the possibilities for group action? Is group action superior to individual effort? Are individuals constructed as active or passive? Does the group frame action by cooperation? Patronage? Rules? Or competition?

One of the most significant dimensions of any organization is the expression of organizational *goals*. For NPOs, in particular, these articulations can serve as both charter and constraint (Minkoff & Powell, 2006). Looking at organizational statements of goals and mission in a contested climate can potentially tell us how NPOs justify their existence as well as how they rhetorically create success. To that end:

- What is the relative frequency of mission or goal statements? Are goals described as tangible or intangible? In the private interest and needs of individuals, or in terms of broad public impact?
- Can problems be solved? How is success best measured? Are measures of efficiency or measures of effectiveness used? Means or ends? Process or product?

In proposing ways to discern overall changes to the sector, *credibility* represents yet another important area of study. Since Hansmann's influential (1980, 1987) studies,

one of the leading theories of NPO formation holds that when output is unobservable, NPOs have an advantage over other groups. Can a consensus regarding trust in NPOs still be assumed, or is the label now contested? Analyzing the rhetorical dimensions of credibility may provide a basic understanding of how the nonprofit label signifies trustworthiness in the wake of marketization and consumerism.

- Does the NPO make overt use of credibility devices? What dimensions of verbal credibility are evident? Power? Competence? Good will? Idealism? Similarity?
- What kind of evidence does the organization use? How often are dates, sums and quantities provided in the message? When are they used? What sorts of arguments do they support? Which arguments that could be quantified are not?
- What sorts of persons/sources provide testimony for the organization? How often is this dependency manifested? Is there obvious logic to the persons/sources chosen for quotation? What types of sources/persons are never quoted? What propositional content do these narratives reveal? Or mask?

Rational choice theorists have repeatedly shown that volunteers need incentives to participate and argue that these inducements are key to understanding organizational behavior (Clark & Wilson, 1961). Prior research in organizational behavior typically regards NPOs as normative organizations that primarily offer solidary incentives. One interested in the balance between individualism and communalism could gain insight by exploring:

- What incentives for participation are offered? Can the incentives best be categorized as material, solidary, or purposive?

- Are incentives related to normative or utilitarian means of control? Is the reward system outcome oriented? Are members managed by information, rules, and logic or are leadership rituals and social and prestige symbols emphasized?

Finally, there is an overall concern with ideological hybridization in the NPVS. The values espoused by an NPO cohere around *ideologies* that link values with other beliefs and norms and make up a guide for action (Amernic & Craig, 2004). Values, in other words, point to larger ideologies. Surveying an NPO's argumentative reasoning might potentially reveal unspoken ideological assumptions. And detailing which premises require discussion can point to ideological trouble spots (Hart, 1971). The following probes are employed in this pursuit:

- What are the major claims being made by the organization? What is the data supplied to back up these claims? Which arguments require supporting material? Which do not?
- What justification authorizes the claims being made by the organization? Is such reasoning expressly supplied by the rhetor and which arguments are left unspoken?
- What accounts are provided to explain the choices made by the organization? What episodes, narratives, or stories provide information give information about organizational motives?

CONCLUSION

In summary, I did not set out on uncharted waters alone; I had guidestars that pointed me in the right direction. I found inspiration in the work of Wuthnow and Bellah et al. but, while these authors concentrated on the individual habits of volunteers, I chose

to take a step back, enlarging the frame to include both individual volunteers and address nonprofits as organizations as well. I attempted to embrace the constructed, contested, and sometimes contradictory nature of values. These assumptions resonate with social constructionism. But theories of organizational culture and neo-institutionalism also tell us that NPOs are contextually embedded in history and society. Because none of these traditions directly address the discursive impact of societal and market value orientations in the nonprofit and voluntary sector, I combined them in this study to produce a holistic, integrated perspective of NPOs. Rhetorical analysis was chosen as a means for exploring organizational values as a mutable, fluctuating universe. The critical probes outlined here became my map, allowing me to read the newsletters of twenty-one nonprofit organizations with considerable understanding.

When dealing with the subject of values, one's efforts will never be entirely precise or objective (Jeavons, 1998) and so some of my epistemological choices reflect my own values and beliefs about language. Like Beasley (2004) and Tony Watson (1994), I acknowledge that my work is interpretive and, like them, I have tried to make a persuasive case for that approach. Herein lies some difficulty. Any critic worth his or her salt knows that people are persuaded differently. For instance, a common objection might be that newsletters are contrived, that they are not really representative of an organization. I can do no better than to point to Beasley (2004) who believes that this is only one possibility. Alternatively, I argue, newsletters might be viewed as *more* meaningful precisely because they are contrived. For example, while family portraits may not tell you much about the ups and downs of an individual family, they often speak volumes about the ideal image of an "American family" (Beasley, 2004).

Other critics might contend that, "No one ever reads these things!" While that may sometimes be true, I am less interested in actual reader demographics than in the

audience that these texts imagine or imply (Black, 1970; Cheney & Frenette, 1993). While I will not include every example I uncovered or use every organization to document every finding, I will support my claims by providing the reader with rich examples from the NPOs so that a representative picture emerges.

Throughout this study I will try to be a good listener and let the NPOs speak for themselves. Accordingly, the following chapters provide what I hope is a rich description of the modern, contested nonprofit and voluntary sector. In chapters three through six, I focus on the rhetorical scars left by the battle between opposing values that are evident in how NPOs discuss identity, trust, hierarchy, and mission. Chapter three looks at identity, a primary concern for any organization but, for NPOs, an especially urgent one. Chapter four explores trust. In particular, I ask the question: “Does the nonprofit label alone still signify trustworthiness?” Chapter five deals with a particularly nettlesome organizational issue for NPOs, hierarchy. In an attempt to reconcile public perception with organizational reality, I ask, are nonprofits caught in a web of their own creation? Chapter six investigates the concepts of mission and meaning in a postmodern cultural environment, probing the question: “Has the U.S. become too cynical to believe in altruism as traditionally conceived?” Chapter seven concludes with a series of questions: “What might we expect of NPOs in the future?” “Has struggling with modernity been worth the battle?” and “What does the current state of NPOs tell us about American culture writ large?”

Chapter 3: Identity: Getting and Giving

“What they [NPO volunteers] like about voluntarily caring for other people is that it removes them temporarily from the money economy. They enjoy not having to sell themselves in the marketplace the way they so often have to do in their jobs.”

--Robert Wuthnow

INTRODUCTION

With the exception of the U.S. Constitution, The Federalist Papers, and The Declaration of Independence, there are few, if any, historical texts more familiar to contemporary Americans than de Tocqueville's (1835/2000) Democracy in America. In this revered monograph, scholars and citizens focus considerable attention on one passage, which has come to stand for what makes the country unique:

Americans of all ages, all conditions and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general, or restricted, enormous, or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they found hospitals, prisons, and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society. (p. 115)

De Tocqueville's famous quotation locates the difference between the old world and the new in the American nonprofit and voluntary sector. His reflections on voluntary associations represent an ideological inheritance passed down from generation to generation in the United States. As such, de Tocqueville's commentary has moved into the realm of a “folk concept,” an idea that is used by, and has meaning for, ordinary people going about their everyday life (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 25). Nonprofits are,

as Nina Eliasoph (2003) describes, “as an apple is to fruit”, the very model of altruistic behavior (p. 211).

Yet consider a recent promotion for the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation and the Kentucky Fried Chicken Corporation (KFC). For a limited time, participating KFC franchise locations sold specially designed pink buckets of chicken. Each pink, fried chicken-filled bucket had a “call to action” and the names of breast cancer survivors and victims printed on the side. KFC pledged 50 cents for each bucket sold and a minimum donation of \$1million dollars. The goal was to make the largest-ever single donation—\$8 million dollars. The Komen Foundation called this campaign “Buckets for the Cure™.”

This campaign raised a few eyebrows. For one thing, it was ill-timed. The same week “Buckets for the Cure™” was introduced, KFC also revealed its newest “sandwich” the “Double Down,” an artery-clogging concoction that replaced buns with two pieces of fried chicken, bacon, and cheese. Doctors wondered why the Komen Foundation, a well-respected NPO specializing in healthcare, would seek to increase sales for a high-fat, high-calorie food. After all, such a diet actually raises a woman’s risk of getting cancer. While the concerns raised by doctors were certainly justified, this study posits a different question, one relating to the identity of NPOs. The KFC/Komen partnership challenges scholars of NPOs to ask, “Would de Tocqueville even be able to recognize such an effort as part of the NPVS he so eloquently described?”

The “Buckets for the Cure”™ example sounds obscene: How could a well-known, well-regarded NPO risk its reputation by selling fried chicken? But it may be more common than one might think. I suggest that the presence, the very possibility, of such a partnership indicates that the NPVS is in the midst of a full-blown identity crisis. As a result, it makes sense to ask, “What force is prompting this crisis of identity?” In

the following chapter, I argue that an increase in the forces of competition have disrupted the traditional identity of NPOs. Increases in competition for members and funding are now placing NPOs in a heightened state of liminality, an ambiguous space where consumerist and altruistic voices become rivals, or so I shall argue here.

BECOMING COMPETITIVE

Two key changes have transpired that increase the amount of competition NPOs face for the time and attention of members, donors, and volunteers. First, cultural critics and media scholars have noted an upswing in the sheer number of messages to which all citizens are exposed, heightening the competition NPO messages face when trying to “break through the clutter” when communicating with members. Second, there has been an explosion of growth and diversity in the NPVS itself. The number of NPOs grows each year and today over 1.5 million of these organizations is registered to operate in the United States (Stork & Woodilla, 2007). For NPOs that must compete for members, this trend has raised the stakes considerably.

A barrage of images, symbols, and messages now vie for people’s limited attention today (Jarvis, 2005). Al Ries and Jack Trout (2001) point out that we live in an “overcommunicated society” and connecting with audiences becomes complicated because “there’s a traffic jam on the turnpikes of the mind” (p. 13). This trend is evident in advertising research. For instance, Jarvis (2005) summarizes key findings from recent marketing studies demonstrating that (1) the number of television advertisements adults are exposed to increased by more than 20 percent; (2) young viewers receive an estimated 40,000 advertisements a year; and (3) the ability to avoid messages has increased with enhanced technology. The result of this communication explosion has, ironically, created an implosion in organizational distinctiveness (Cheney & Christensen, 2001).

Organizations of all types devote ever-increasing attention to building and managing their overall impression or image (McMillan & Meisenbach, 2006). Simply standing out, not to mention winning the hearts and minds of audiences, becomes extraordinarily difficult in today's competitive information environment.

The NPVS is also increasingly crowded. According to the 2008 National Nonprofit Almanac, the number of nonprofit organizations registered with the IRS grew by 27.3 percent from 1995 to 2005 (Blackwood, Wing, & Pollak, 2008). The growth has been primarily in the area that the Urban Institute defines as public charities. Public charities include “most organizations active in the arts, education, health care, and human services” (Wing, Roeger, & Pollak, 2009). This part of the sector grew at more than twice the rate of other nonprofit organizations and now accounts for more than 60 percent of all registered NPOs and nearly 59 percent of all reporting NPOs.

Even as public charities have experienced tremendous expansion, the number of volunteers has declined. In 2006, 26.7 percent of adults volunteered through an organization. This figure is down from 2003–2005, when volunteer rates remained steady at 28.8 percent. Even with some indication that volunteer rates may be headed upward, the most recent data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute indicated that the total number of hours volunteered still declined in each of the last two years (Wing, et al., 2009). Taken together, these data show that a larger number of organizations is competing over a dwindling number of volunteers.

The rise in the number of organizations means that groups must not only compete for members but also for funding. The recent economic downturn has reduced the amount of private, foundation, and government funds available. Giving USA reports that charitable contributions by individuals, corporations, and foundations decreased 5.6% in 2008, with individual giving declining at the highest rate (6.3%). However, only 22% of

public charity finances are derived from private contributions, gifts, and grants (Stork & Woodilla, 2007). Many NPOs receive the most money (67%) from government grants and other program revenue sources.

As I will suggest at greater length in the next chapter, the sector has witnessed dramatic changes in government funding. Salamon (1999) encapsulates the situation when he writes: “After years of expanding government support, NPOs have had to adjust to what appears to be a permanent situation of budget stringency” (1999, p. 8). The “devolution revolution” begun under President Reagan removed regulatory burdens and encouraged privatization through rhetorical support of the nonprofit and voluntary sector. In exchange for reduced revenue and heightened expectations, the President promoted the application of business models to help NPOs “do more with less.” This process continued under presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and does not seem likely to abate (Salamon, 1999).

Faced with shrinking government support and increasing responsibility, creative, “outside-the-box” approaches for generating revenue have gained prominence (other trends stemming from dependence on government support will be explored in the next chapter). Entrepreneurial models for NPO behavior are a “hot topic” in the NPVS, as evidenced by the vast array of programs, experts, books, and foundations advising NPOs to turn to revenue-generating enterprises as a more stable form of funding. In this sense, marketization can be thought of as a linguistic practice. According to Simpson and Cheney (2007), marketization is a “framework of market-oriented principles, values, practices, and vocabularies” (p. 191).

The phenomenon of marketization as revenue generation in the form of user fees and ancillary activities is not entirely new (James, 2004; Weisbrod, 1998). Girl Scout cookies, Goodwill, and the Salvation Army are all familiar examples. The level that

NPOs are currently engaging in this behavior, however, is stunning. Kerlin and Pollack (2006) analyzed IRS data and found that commercial activities of NPOs increased 219% from 1982 to 2002. The hope is that this money can be used to finance other mission-related programs (Weisbrod, 1998). While this move has been heralded by some scholars as advantageous to the health of the sector (Dees & Anderson, 2004), the gains may be short-term. Why? Because as nonprofits have ventured over into territory previously staked out by the for-profit sector, the NPO's entrepreneurial, revenue-generating programs are now attracting the attention of for-profit entities.

Competition from for-profit firms, according to James (2004), is more prevalent in some areas than others. The social service providers, especially those focusing on areas like health care, social services to the disabled or elderly, and education have felt the intrusion of for-profits most acutely. On this point, Salamon and Sokolowski (2003) believe that there has been an increasing bifurcation of the sector into organizations that have a "use-value" to society and its members (i.e. provide a service) and groups that do not transfer any discernable economic value to participants.

Ryan (1999) documents the effect of this change. To compete with for-profit businesses, he finds, NPOs are increasingly turning toward serving individuals and away from expressive activities such as education and advocacy, which have traditionally been conceived as important, altruistic functions of the sector (Rose-Ackerman, 1996). As NPOs embrace their role as service providers in the market, some of the features that make them distinctive are potentially eliminated. Some researchers have even begun to wonder if NPOs are functioning as commercial operations with "pecuniary rather than altruistic objectives" (Weisbrod, 1998, p. 49). In this environment, claims Salamon (2003), it can be difficult to detect differences between nonprofit and for-profit firms. In sum, competition from other NPOs and for-profit corporations is forcing NPVS scholars

and practitioners as well as individual organizations to grapple with the most fundamental question of identity: “Who are we?”

AN IDENTITY CRISIS

The concept of “identity” has a long, well traveled history in Western thought. Recently, the concept has become a preoccupation for individuals, organizations, and researchers (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). Cheney argues that identity is, in fact, the central term in the study of social life (Cheney, 1991). As a result, the identity literature is vast and a complete review is beyond the scope of this study. However, several key concepts are crucial for our purposes: (1) identity as a “distinctive essence”; (2) its derivation from the communicative process of association and division; and (3) its extension to the organizational setting.

At a foundational level, researchers of individual identity believe that identity provides “relatively stable characteristics that make up the self. Each identity references certain norms and other ideas about who we are, how we are to act, and what is important to us” (Scott, et al., 1998, p. 328). Albert and Whetten (1985) claim it is “a classification of the self that identifies the individual as recognizably different from others (and similar to members of the same class)” (p. 26). Notably, the focus on identity as a distinctive essence setting individuals apart from others is a relatively recent notion (Cheney, 1991).

A pioneer in the field of rhetoric, Kenneth Burke, viewed human communication as largely centered on the concept of identity. He theorized that identity is based on affiliation and separation. To define our individuality, we engage in a process of affiliating with other individuals, collectivities, and categories while, at the same time, estranging ourselves from other social units. Burke (1966) famously observed: “There are two kinds of terms: terms that put things together and terms that take them apart.

Otherwise put, A can feel himself identified with B, or he can think of himself as dissociated from B” (pp. 21-22). Cheney (1991) extended Burke’s early assertion and argues that “associations between terms reveal much about associations between people” (1991, p. 16). For Burke (and Cheney), the process of identity construction is a rhetorical one.

The concept of identity is extended to organizations in the works of Scott (1998), Cheney (see especially 1983, 1991), and Albert and Whetten (1985) (Meisenbach & McMillin, 2006 offer a full review). Organizations can be thought of as having both a unique identity and as facilitating identification among members. Organizations establish an identity in much the same way as individuals. Organizational communication efforts such as newsletters, annual reports, and other texts are an opportunity for the organization to share its own “identifications.” Cheney (1991) writes:

To speak of collective identity is to speak of collective or shared interests—or at least how the interests of a collective are represented or understood. This is a fundamental concern of contemporary organizations...organizations are in the business of identity management; their controlling members must be concerned about how to (re) present the organization as a whole. (p. 14)

The identities available at any given moment to either individuals or organizations, however, are contingent on social, economic, cultural, political, and historical forces. We can “choose” our identity, but only to the degree that some roles are made available to us and others are not. How we arrive at that selection is a reflection of “the interplay between what an individual may potentially become, what is available to him at a given time, and how those sets of roles and identities are changing over time” (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 273). For NPOs, the process of competition has opened up roles that previously had been off limits.

The availability of new roles is likely to bring about identity crises. Albert and Whetten (1985) hold that organizational identity issues will surface during: (1) formation, (2) loss of a sustaining element, (3) accomplishment of the *raison d'être*, (4) extremely rapid growth, (5) a change in collective status, and (6) retrenchment. Several of the changes wrought by forces of competition bear striking resemblance to the predictors Albert and Whetten describe. Competition has burdened nonprofit organizations financially, the sector is experiencing an amount of enormous growth, and these groups have increased their collective status by engaging in partnerships with other NPOs and corporations (such as the Komen/KFC partnership). The foregoing studies help to explain why identity emerges as an issue for modern nonprofits and why the texts of the NPOs studied here bear the marks of that struggle. The constant battle between maintaining an altruistic image and the need to portray themselves as competent economic actors produced four features in the NPO discourse: (1) they adopted the language of business; (2) they reimagined the public as a consumer; (3) they touted the establishment of strategic partnerships; and (4) they constructed events to heighten the appearance of productivity. Throughout my investigation, one thing became apparent; altruism and consumerism have become rhetorical rivals in defining the character of today's NPOs.

CONSUMERIST AND ALTRUISTIC VOICES BECOME RIVALS

NPOs adopt the language of business and the marketplace

My research is not the first to note market-oriented principles intruding into areas previously not part of the market (Simpson & Cheney, 2007). For instance, Du Gay and Salaman (1992) recognize the encroachment of an "enterprise culture" into British public services in the 1990's. At various moments in the United States, concerns have been

raised over the unimpeded flow of the market ethos (Ventriss, 1991). In short, many scholars have theorized that business-like language is now penetrating into realms of life that have traditionally resisted its influence (Kuttner, 1997). As of yet, however, few have attempted to investigate if this discourse is displacing other forms of description in nonprofit organizations (Dart, 2004).

In my examination of a broad array of NPO texts, I found that they all adopted the language of business, implicitly highlighting the *profit motive* and calling attention to the *means and structures* used to achieve pro-social ends. Business terminology was most commonly used in the context of donor contributions. The NPO newsletters framed issues in terms of gain and loss by recasting members as “investors” and their participation as an “investment.” Some of these appeals were explicit, almost over-the-top such as: “Looking for a great return on your *investment*?” (“Triple your money,” 2009, August); “the more that you *invest* in your Chamber membership, the more you will benefit” (“Volunteer opportunities,” 2009, March); “*Invest* in a girl’s future” (“Invest in a future,” 2009, November); and “help the ministry *leverage* its funds” (“CCSC expands,” 2008). It wasn’t just the pro-business Chamber of Commerce that made such crass appeals. The above comments came from organizations that could not be more different—a social justice organization (NEDAP), a group providing social services (GENaustin), and a Christian charity (CCSC), respectively. Yet all chose the same rhetorical path. In selecting an investment metaphor for donations, each of these organizations told donors they would receive something in return for their money.

Other organizations were not as explicit. Consider the following example from Family-to-Family, a nonprofit organization primarily focused on feeding hungry families:

\$150 is going to Jesse Mae Walker’s (our Pembroke, Illinois community link) daughter, whose name is Whitney. She’s a baker and bakes pies, cookies and

cakes to sell during the holidays. She's best known for her sweet potato pie. With these funds she'll buy the ingredients she needs, plus make up some business cards and flyers. Whitney took a young entrepreneur class offered by social services and has made up a business plan...we'll be asking the three entrepreneurs to do a report on their business. ("Money from Ziv," 2007, March)

The calculation of gain and loss is surely suggested in this report. Why does Jesse Mae Walker's niece, Whitney, make for a sound investment? Because she has a business plan, business cards, took a class on entrepreneurship, and will demonstrate her success in a business report. By putting \$150 dollars down, "investors" will reap the rewards when Whitney becomes self-sufficient. They may even get a piece of pie in the bargain. This type of discourse may be commonplace in the corporate world, but it strikes a strange chord when appropriated by groups with altruistic goals and methods.

It is hard to imagine such an appeal from the nonprofits of the past. In the first half of the twentieth century, nonprofit rhetors petitioned audiences differently, as did Peter Mauin in 1933 when advocating for Houses of Hospitality, a Christian charity providing assistance to the needy:

We need Houses of Hospitality
to give to the rich

The opportunity to serve the poor....

We need Houses of Hospitality
to bring back to institutions
the technique of institutions.

We need Houses of Hospitality

To show what idealism looks like when it is practiced. (as cited in Allahyari, 2000 p. 37)

Remarkably, the missions of Family-to-Family and Houses of Hospitality are not all that different; both were established to give charitable assistance to the less fortunate. Notice, however, the striking contrast in their linguistic practices. The corporate terms of art are missing from Maurin's text. The Family-to-Family piece, as is so often the case when human affairs are described in market definitions, is reductionistic. The comments

“concretize” and “body forth” the economic philosophy it represents. In contrast, Houses of Hospitality is a text that elevates, using a utopian ideal to raise the organization’s work to the level of moral righteousness (Hart, 1984).

Today’s NPOs not only adopted the language of business, they championed its symbols and organizational management theories as well. Organizations drew attention to their status as de facto businesses by displaying their Trademarks and Registered symbols. The Komen Foundation, for instance, placed the TM symbol whenever the words “for the cure” appeared. They also placed the ® designation adjacent to tag lines such as “Komen is on the Go.” These symbols were also associated with program names and logos in the newsletters of other national organizations such as Alex’s Lemonade Foundation for Childhood Cancer and Communities in Schools. Companies wanting to protect their legal “rights” and to highlight their status as verifiable corporate entities traditionally use these symbols. When used by nonprofits, on the other hand, both a message and a meta-message are sent. Trademark and registered symbols convey a legal protection but also make a statement that the NPO is aware that it represents a brand with literal and symbolic value.

Discussions of management practices drawn from the business world were common as well. The frequency with which these groups discussed the structural means of achieving their goals was notable. Instead of focusing primarily on the benefit of participation as an end in itself, many organizations headlined their processes for improving organizational efficiency. In some cases, references to management and planning tools were brief. “Time quality management,” “strategic planning,” “SWOT analysis,” and other technocratic turns of phrase are now de rigeur in the business sector. The appearance of such terms seems odd, however, when used by the Christian Community Services (CCSC) of Houston. Their newsletter, Connections, contained a

detailed recounting of using a SWOT analysis to decide the future of “Martha’s Way,” its vocational training program for housekeepers:

In early 2007, an ad hoc committee was formed to assess CCSC’s Martha’s Way program, recommend ways to strengthen client services, and provide recommendations for future program development. The committee invested much time in conducting a SWOT analysis: analyzing the program’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In addition, graduates and homeowners who had hired graduates were surveyed. This body of research, along with direct interviews of instructors and key volunteers, provided the foundation for the committee’s recommendations...which is pulling together highly-skilled persons from member churches to conduct strategic planning and capacity building in specific areas. ("Martha's way," 2008)

Notably, CCSC decided to promote the strategy behind the implementation of its new program and not, say, the program itself. Burke might label the NPO’s enthusiasm over implementation a means/ends confusion. The structural and the ethical are interwoven and being an innovative organization is equated with helping others (Du Gay & Salaman, 1992). In this example, CCSC went beyond simply describing their activities in business terminology; they granted consumerism a higher level of reality by enshrining it in their organizational procedures.

Taken together, the NPOs are signaling acceptance of the market by speaking its language. In so doing, they tapped into a deep cultural vein (Eikenberry, 2009). American society has long-embraced business and entrepreneurial approaches and the political values of the U.S. promote individual initiative, freedom, the belief in the superiority of the free market system, and suspicion of government intervention in the classic liberal tradition (Hart & Daughton, 2005). In light of this, business language may seem quite normal. Even researchers can be lulled by its familiarity, as Dart (2004), in his article “Being ‘Business-like in a Nonprofit Organization,” illustrates:

The final dimension of business-like documented at the [nonprofit organization] is primarily linguistic rather than substantive. This dimension is in the realm of

rhetoric, discourse, language, and exemplars that refers to many elements of the [NPO] using business terminology...there were myriad examples where the [NPO], its programs, its structures, and so forth were described and referred to as business, yet where this rhetoric had only minimal meaning. (p. 302)

Respectfully, I must disagree. Given the evidence here, when the language of business is removed from the economic system (capitalism) that it represents, I argue that it is a very substantive development, indeed. Accepting the adoption of the seemingly “meaningless” discourse of business, I argue, has naturalized a bigger move: the reimagining of nonprofit members as consumers.

Sometimes doing good means knowing where to shop

To say that the NPOs examined here are reimagining their members as consumers is to argue that they are now treating organizational participation (and philosophical commitment) as equivalent to consumption. This equation would have been unthinkable in the past. Albert and Whetten (1985) posit that, at one time, NPOs were “above” using advertising and marketing approaches to reach out to members, relying instead on “missionary work.” Walker Gibson (1966) calls the rhetoric of advertising “sweet talk.” One of the keys to recognizing this discourse is the overt way in which the speaker establishes intimacy with the audience. Gibson claims that in the rhetoric of advertising, audiences are directly assaulted by the use of the personal pronoun, “you” and asked to respond to rhetorical questions. He offers the following example: “Dry skin? Not me darling. Every inch of me is as smooth as (well, you know what). Because I never, never bathe without Sardo” (Gibson, 1966, p. 87).

Ironically, in his analysis of marketing communication in nonbusiness situations, Michael Rothchild (1979) concluded that it is hard to “sell brotherhood like soap” (p. 11). Many of the NPOs today, however, make exactly that move by addressing their members in the “sweet” style of advertising. The most blatant examples I found combined the

“sweet” voice of advertising with the promotion of an actual product. Consider the following examples from The Source, a vocational education and support organization, and the United Way of Capital Area, respectively:

- Get your GED Now. Can’t get promoted because you don’t have a high school diploma or GED? Is not having a GED holding you back? You don’t know how to start? Then call The Source at 452-5295 and one of our caseworkers can guide you through the process. ("Get your G.E.D," 2009, September)
- Looking to stay in shape while helping the United Way? If you join local gym Anytime Fitness ® of Austin or Bee Cave and mention United Way, you’ll have a great facility to help you reach your fitness goals...and the best part is, Anytime Fitness will donate 5% of your dues to United Way right off the top. So you’ll help fund local programs that benefit Central Texans year-round. Win-Win for everyone.” ("Anytime fitness," 2009, February)

By emphasizing “you” and confronting members with a series of rhetorical questions, these examples make social service programs sound eerily similar to purely marketplace commodities. Other advertorial nods included: the impulse-driven telemarketer’s “then call,” the mysterious and exciting phrase “and the best part is,” and the confident proclamation that it will be a “Win-Win” for everyone. One would hardly be blamed for forgetting that The Source and the United Way are not, in fact, products.

The blurring of sales with social causes was even more discordant when organizations rhetorically collapsed the two activities—in the phraseology of the United Way Capital Area, “Sometimes being good just means knowing where to shop” ("Sometimes," 2009, May). NPOs encouraged participants to show their support not by giving but by consuming the products of companies sometimes barely related to the organization’s mission. The NPOs in this study that chose to treat their members as markets were as diverse and extensive as the products they promoted.

In this regard, however, one organization deserves special mention. The organization that was willing to pair its message with fried, fatty foods in its Buckets for the Cure™ promotion surpassed all others in the amount of space devoted to informing audiences about the products of other companies. In what could be called “Consuming for the Cure,” the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation newsletter KomenLink invited audiences to: Cook for the Cure, Read for the Cure, Bank for the Cure, Bowl for the Cure, Get Fit for the Cure, Plant for the Cure, Clean for the Cure, Earn Miles for the Cure, and Massage for the Cure. All they had to do was buy a KitchenAide appliance, purchase a book from Barnes and Noble, bank at Chase, bowl at a PBA bowling alley, wear a Wacoal bra, get plants and cleaning supplies from Lowes, fly Delta Airlines, and visit Massage Envy, respectively. The list was seemingly endless. In addition to each month’s “shopportunities,” Komen offered its own products for sale. Readers were told: “ShopKomen.com is open for business. ShopKomen offers merchandise and educational materials with a minimum of 25 percent of your purchase price benefiting the Susan G. Komen for the Cure ® and the promise to end breast cancer forever. New items will be added daily” (“ShopKomen,” 2009, July). And they were.

One would be hard-pressed to invent a better example of the contemporary spectacle of consumption than the above excerpts. The altruistic voice here is completely annihilated. Instead of identification by rhetorical association, one might regard this approach as identification-by-commodification. And, as striking as the Komen Foundation comments are on the surface, the implications are even more disturbing. Taken to its logical conclusion, “the correlative of the spectacle is thus the spectator, the passive viewer and consumer of a social system predicated on submission and conformity” (Best & Kellner, 1997, p. 88).

Scholars in communication, political science, and public administration have voiced concern over the increasing prominence of the metaphor of the consumer/citizen. Edelman (1971) writes that metaphors “create and filter out value premises. They highlight the benefits that flow from a course of action and erase its unfortunate concomitants, helping the speaker and his listeners conceal disturbing implications from themselves” (p. 70). Like the metaphor of “student as consumer,” the citizen/consumer highlights an entertainment model of participation and reinforces individualism (McMillan & Cheney, 1996). The self-interested notions that it implies—customer satisfaction, the customer is always right—alter the communal base on which NPOs were theorized to exist, stripping the NPVS of its “publicness” (Harwood, 2001). That Americans have lost their sense of community may result from the anxiety that the citizen/consumer conceals. De Tocqueville would certainly be surprised that the altruistic Americans who originally developed the nonprofit and voluntary association were now being targeted as self-interested consumers.

To this point, I have proposed that the adoption of business language and the reimagining of its members as consumers are threatening the distinctive identity of NPOs. But the identity battle brought on by the forces of competition is being waged on two additional fronts: in the multiplicity of partnerships and collaborations that NPOs are embracing and by the excessive promotion of productivity. It is to these topics that I now turn.

Partnerships are advantageous

Maximization is a powerful principle of capitalist economics (Cheney & Frenette, 1993). Economists contend that, in a competitive market, businesses will operate in a manner that gains the maximum amount given the resources available to them. In light of

the competitive environment of today's nonprofit sector, the instinct to collaborate and partner with corporations and other NPOs can be interpreted as a trend toward maximization. In search of increasing economies of scale and efficiency, nonprofits are placed in the position of needing to partner with corporations and other nonprofit organizations to increase impact and awareness (Bush, 1992).

Amidst fierce competition for funding, NPOs have turned to corporate partnerships. Eikenberry (2009) labels this type of relationship "cause-related marketing," which she defines as "profit-motivated giving that enables firms to contribute to NPOs while also increasing their bottom line" (p. 19). King (2006) points out the difference between this type of partnership and traditional, corporate philanthropy:

Unlike traditional charity promotions, in which a brand or company simply donated money to a cause or sponsored a range of unrelated charities without coherent strategy, cause-related marketing seeks to ensure that the brand and the cause share the same "territory" in a "living altruistic partnership for mutual benefit." (p. 115)

Today, it is fair to ask whether the symbiotic relationship King posits is really the case or, indeed, whether the relationship might be better characterized as parasitic?

The following example shows how hard it can be for an NPO (Communities in Schools) to "share the same territory" with a software company:

SAS is a big believer in preparing students for the global economy, according to Patricia Spain, one of the company's field marketing specialists. That makes its partnership with Communities in Schools a perfect fit...Our summer sale is a sort of "back to school special" that offers customers 30 percent off learning materials during the month of August and September. We wanted to do something a little different, and tying the program to education seemed like a really good idea...and we asked if we could use the logo and where to send the check. ("Back," 2009, March)

In the above passage, it seems probable that such partnerships let corporations literally and symbolically capitalize on the pro-social values of the nonprofit itself, thereby

potentially cheapening one brand (the NPO's) while enhancing the other brand (the corporation's). At best, the company quoted above has a cavalier attitude toward the relationship. The common ground, "a sort of back to school special," seems strained and the donation represents merely an attempt to "do something a little different." At worst, SAS is aware that it controls the strings (give us your logo—your symbolic coinage—and we'll send the money) and exploits CIS to sell its products. Just as publics were turned into consumers, strategies like these rhetorically blur the line between altruism and consumerism.

Collaborations with other NPOs presented a different set of identity issues. The Voices of September 11th partnered extensively with other nonprofits possessing similar missions. Their newsletter was full of detailed accounts of the accomplishments and activities of their partner organizations. For example, Voices encouraged audiences to participate in the "Run to Remember" honoring the memory of 9/11 victims and to share their "9/11 story" with the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in collaboration with Arlington County and StoryCorp ("Run," 2009, August). The problem was, however, that these groups perform essentially the same function as the Voices of September 11th. Each was established to "remember" the tragedy of September 11th by recording survivor stories.

Ironically, partnerships like these may cause audience members to "forget." As a result of the partnership, Voices may have inadvertently created more competition for scarce resources. Or, as Zimmerman and Dart (1998) put it, some partnerships can place NPOs in danger of "cannibalizing" their own. Practically speaking, then, partnerships with other organizations and corporations can reduce the total number of dollars available for donation. But there is also the possibility that individual organizational identity can be lost in the mix. For instance, United Way Capital Area may have joined together with

twelve other NPOs for all of the right reasons. Yet the coalition's slogan "We are One," certainly obscured what made each group unique ("We are one," 2009, April). In the past, NPOs might have resisted the urge to merge not because they wanted to decrease their impact but out of a desire to protect the uniqueness of their mission, message, and, of course, their identity (Frumkin, 2004).

Events are constructed to promote productivity

Every organization faces the fundamental questions of "What do we do?" and "Who are we?" These questions are related but they contain important differences. The former references technological aspects of production while the latter is, of course, a question of identity. Frumkin's (2005) work on the core functions of NPOs explores both questions. He maps the debate over the dimensions of instrumental (what we do) and expressive (who we are) outputs in the NPVS. One school of thought believes that instrumental outputs are the main function of NPOs, while the other holds that its expressive nature defines the sector (Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000). Has the market forced today's NPOs to take a side in this debate? Or, put differently, have pressures at the sector level made their way down to affect how nonprofits construct and promote their activities?

For the groups examined here, the answer is "yes." More specifically, NPOs reserved the greatest amount of physical and textual space in their newsletters to describing, listing, and promoting past and future events (in other words, what they *do*). Such information could typically be located under the headings of "Community News" or "Chapter and Community Updates." One might argue that this is precisely the function of a newsletter—to build momentum—and few would dispute the right of NPOs to self-promote. However, the excessive prominence and relative consistency with which all of

these groups did so, regardless of age, interest area, degree of professionalization, or primary funding source, suggest that something more than a mere recapping of events is taking place. In each newsletter, the desire to appear “productive” seemed to outweigh other concerns. As a result, the newsletters focused heavily on describing activities that made them seem “busy.”

Even without the “sweet” voice of advertising, some groups still left the impression that they were hawking their wares:

- Veterans for Peace, Chapter 26 in the Chicago area wrote: On Memorial Day weekend, Chicago-Area Chapter 26 members marched in the Chicago parade with the Combined Veteran’s Organization (May 23rd) and participated in the combined VFP/VVSW/IVAW Memorial Day Ceremony. In June, VPF and IVAW members tabled at the CSN Concert (4th), staffed the Chicago Homeless Veterans’ Stand-Down (11th-13), attended the Chicago Peace Fest (19th-20th) and chapter president Ray Parrish took part in “Light the Darkness” a suicide prevention walk. (“Chapter 26,” 2009, August)
- The New York City Women’s Club began each issue of “Agenda” with WCC ACTS. This feature listed the groups’ activities: “wrote Governor Spitzer;” “wrote NYC’s Deputy Mayor for Education;” “urged the Governor;” “endorsed a Families USA letter;” and “recommended ways the Board of Elections can ensure confidence.” (“Acts,” 2007, Winter)

Above all else, productivity is valued in the above passages. The verb-driven rhetoric embodies the premise of production: “Produce (and consume) as much as possible” (Cheney & Frenette, 1993, pp. 64-67). This is especially evident when groups omitted any narrative thread, as did WCC in the last example.

However, the importance of productivity made its absence all the more striking. To remain relevant in a crowded field, NPOs needed to maintain the appearance of being productive, even if that was not the case. The LBJ Future Forum, a membership organization of young adult leaders, provided a perfect example of this imperative at

work. The group did not have much going on but they clearly felt they needed to appear active, an anxiety they betrayed by frequently calling members' attention to incipient events and activities: "As always we are busy planning even more, so keep your eyes peeled for more soon" ("Intro," 2010, March); "If you missed our first event, don't despair; we will host many more great events...There's lots of activity at the LBJ Library" ("Off," 2009, October); and "although things appear to be a bit quiet here over the summer, we are hard at work on a number of events and other additions for the Fall" ("Greetings," 2009, July) were among the many examples. In the standard feature "Doers and Builders," the group wrote about other community groups and events as if the Future Forum itself was involved with their activities. To create the perception of productivity, members were told: "There are also plenty of opportunities to join us—or at least the LBJ Family of institutions—this month. And several of our Doers and Builders have events this month, so please check them out"("Doers," 2009, May).

Audiences could easily get the idea that the "organization doth protest too much" in these examples. Not only does the Future Forum insist that, despite appearances, it is in fact being productive, it also presumptuously labeled "borrowed" activity as "ours." I find it doubtful that attentive audiences would find this strategy convincing. Although it is out of the scope of this study, one could also imagine that productivity expectations are also driving the adoption of new media like Twitter and Facebook. As was the case in the Future Forum example above, the frequent use of these technologies doesn't necessarily mean that NPOs have increased how much they are doing but it does create the impression that they are always doing something.

Taken together, the NPOs examined here bear the marks of competition through (1) adopting the language of business, (2) reimagining their members as consumers, (3) maximizing their efforts by partnering with corporate and community entities, and (4)

promoting productivity. The intrusion of these market-oriented tendencies collapses the barriers between the self-interested for-profit world and the nonprofit and voluntary sector, the boundary that once stood between altruism and consumerism. This trend poses a significant threat to the long-term identities of NPOs. But before that threat can be considered, it is imperative to ask why these effects might have occurred in the first place.

LIMINALITY, OR BEING CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

In reflecting on the evidence in this chapter, it appears that the nonprofit and voluntary sector is increasingly caught in the middle, caught, as it is, between the state and the market and between a set of practical and axiological constraints. Traditionally, their tax-free legal status requires that NPOs work in the public interest. That benefit was instituted to induce behavior and to incentivize social good, which otherwise might not have occurred (James, 2004). The sector, then, has always shared government's concern with the public good. At the same time, the NPVS stands apart from government and is, in a real sense, part of the private sphere. Because nonprofits have been freed of economic constraints like profitability, however, they are bound by, in Jeavon's (1992) words, an implicit social contract and expected to embody moral goods such as altruism and volunteerism. In a practical and historical sense, NPOs have always occupied an ambiguous space in American life. Even under the best circumstances, they must hold the middle ground and the intrusion of competition has made this ground even more difficult to maintain.

As a result, NPOs are now, perhaps, the ultimate liminal organizations. A literal mixing of nonprofit and for-profit organizations in the provision of social services and an ideological mixing of self-interest and selflessness has occurred. But it is not all that

surprising that the discourse of the market has become entwined with our moral and humanitarian values. After all, a similar battle has long been waged, albeit in other arenas in the U.S. where political tensions between civic and religious forces were resolved by applying what Hart (1977) identifies as the “rhetorical palliative” of civic piety, a “contract” in which both parties agree to rhetorically maintain the balance between church and state.

Politics has settled the tension between irreligiosity and theocracy but it is not yet certain that the same compact will be reached in the case of the NPVS. However, both rhetoric and liminality are full of possibilities for developing a meaningful identity. Wuthnow (1991a) describes liminality as a sublime state:

Betwixt and between. Dawn and dusk have always represented such times. Disrupted periods in a society’s history, such as revolutions, wars, and holidays, have too. Similarly, being on a journey is to be neither here nor there. The journey takes place between the established realms of security our lives provide. At such times, we ourselves may be literally transformed, as in the case of a young tribesman who undergoes a rite of passage that transforms him into a warrior. The transition to a new social position is a transformative journey. In the process, our identities are ambiguous. (p. 179)

CONCLUSION

The forces of increased competition and heightened liminality have had a profoundly unsettling effect on the identity of the NPOs examined in this study. At one extreme, the evidence here gives one pause since the template it provides is individualism in the extreme. A consumerist identity for NPOs is essentially anti-social, straining the bonds of membership because it requires only a limited form of exchange. Indeed, the very idea of a self-sufficient nonprofit threatens the connections that bind these groups to the communities they are designed to serve.

On the other hand, one might imagine reforming the identity of modern NPOs through the practice of critically exposing the ideological assumptions of the market. Such a democratic counter-identity, Eikenberry (2009) argues, could restore benevolence by rejecting market demands. Elsewhere, Eikenberry (2006) sketches the outlines of such a rhetoric as transformational, not transactional, a language focused on social interdependency. In her words, benevolence gives “voice, not just money, to those who are silenced” (p. 986).

Yet another option from this analysis suggests a combination of the two possibilities outlined above. Researchers demonstrate that, under certain circumstances, organizations can and will acquire dual identities. Albert and Whetten (1985) believe that the condition of scarcity is a prime motivating factor in this development. In their analysis of the modern university, they conclude that “understanding that an organization has a dual identity can be an important key in explaining its behavior” (p. 281). Similarly, Cheney (1991) asserts that the primary function of modern organizations is the management of multiple identifications. In order to align their messages with several targets of identification, organizations such as NPOs will espouse multiple values, creating “the ongoing rhetorical struggle...to establish a clearly distinctive identity and at the same time connect with more general concerns so as to be maximally persuasive and effective” (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 233). This perspective best represents the discourse on display in this chapter. For this reason, I conclude that NPOs now have fractured identities.

In the past, NPOs may have been able to circumvent identity issues. They could take for granted the myth of the nonprofit and voluntary sector, one that embodied society’s humanitarian and altruistic values. Such an identity clearly distinguished NPOs from the marketplace. As we have seen here, things have changed and Americans aren’t

quite sure how this makes them feel. When the KFC/Komen ads ran, for example, some audiences were outraged. A slate of negative posts quickly appeared on the Komen discussion page. One contributor asserted “Eat a Breast to Save a Breast,” while another punned, “Fried Chicken for Women’s Health—What the Cluck?”. Yet, alongside these posts ran equally passionate statements arguing “if people are going to buy fast food anyway, at least they buy it in a pink bucket and something good will come out of it” (“What”, 24 April 2010).

In truth, the issue of organizational identity is a complicated and consequential one. As a result, as Albert and Whetten (1985) suggest, most organizations avoid the subject until forced to confront it. Today’s NPOs may well have reached that point.

Chapter 4: Trust: People or Productivity?

“Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.”

--Usually attributed to Albert Einstein

INTRODUCTION

On a bucolic Sunday afternoon, I answered my door and found Aiden decked out in full Cub Scout uniform. In one hand he held a pen and in the other an order form with handwritten names, addresses, and dollar amounts. I knew exactly where this conversation was headed. Or at least I thought I did. Like countless other Americans who receive a similar knock at their door, I anticipated a heartwarming exchange. But, before I could say “Hello,” my cherubic neighbor delivered a mouthful. With rapid-fire precision, Aiden spat out that “70% of your popcorn purchase goes directly to local scouting, not overhead.” I was taken aback. Percentages? Overhead? But, we are neighbors. His mom, Nancy, and I visit about our gardens. He pets my dog when we walk past their home. Why was Aiden’s (obviously) practiced pitch so impersonal?

The smiling six-year-old with red hair and matching ruddy cheeks (along with millions of other Cub, Boy, and Girl Scouts) proved historian David Hammack’s (1995) claim correct that the close relational and religious community ties that once created trust in NPOs have been rendered useless. In the absence of those ties, it seems, a single question has risen to prominence: “What percentage of a donation goes directly to the cause?” There is, perhaps, no other question in the contemporary nonprofit and voluntary sector asked more often (Pallotta, 2008). And why not? The query is simple, providing a common yardstick against which a range of comparisons can presumably be made. In addition, such framing devices allow humans to make it through the day by categorizing

information. But like other objects of a taken-for-granted nature, the utility and the conditions that produced this particular question go relatively unexamined. One might be surprised to learn, for instance, that it is a relative newcomer on the rhetorical scene; questions regarding administrative overhead and excessive fundraising do not even appear until the late 1970's (Pallotta, 2008). It is also true that, in reality, comparing NPOs is difficult, if not impossible. For instance, can a girls' soccer league be compared with a homeless shelter or with a symphony orchestra (Hager & Greenlee, 2004)? And if, as Peter Drucker (1990) suggests, "the product of an NPO is a changed human being," how might one measure a concept as nettlesome as an improved person (p. xiv)? Despite what the public is led to believe by the media, charity watchdog groups, and NPOs themselves, the proportion of a donation that goes directly to a cause reveals very little about a given organization. Indeed, some scholars note that it is not even a very good measure of organizational efficiency (Hager & Greenlee, 2004; Pallotta, 2008).

Thus, the security derived from this question is deceptive. One might stop and wonder, then, why "net donation" has become one of the most important metrics by which the American public evaluates NPOs. Perhaps, more importantly, why do NPOs keep answering it? Could it be, as some have proposed, that society is attempting to avoid the issue of the common good by letting technical and market mechanisms determine collective values (Brown, et al., 2000; Habermas & Shapiro, 1970; Wuthnow, 1991b)? If so, examining how NPOs communicate trust can shed light on these matters. I argue here that there has been a change in the criteria the American public uses to determine a trustworthy nonprofit organization—a shift from people to productivity. In the next section, I assert that high-profile scandal and the infusion of government and foundation funding have both played critical roles in the changing condition of trust in the nonprofit and voluntary sector.

THE CHANGING CONDITIONS OF TRUST FOR NPOS

Although implied above, I believe that it is necessary to acknowledge an important assumption about NPOs—that trust is not a static condition. In fact, Wuthnow (2004) goes so far as to argue that trust is culturally constructed. He writes:

Trust is as much a reflection of culture as it is of behavior. What I mean by this is that that we are more or less inclined to trust someone not only because of how that person has treated us, but also because of how we frame our thinking about that person. For instance, a particular political leader may have never done anything to harm me or to violate my confidence in his or her ability to govern, yet I may be inclined to distrust that leader simply by virtue of the fact that he or she is a politician. (p. 235)

As cultures change, so too does the willingness of individuals to bestow trust on others. With that assumption in mind, one can trace the evolution of trust within the nonprofit and voluntary sector.

Historically, funding for nonprofit organizations came primarily from individual contributions (Brown, et al., 2000). In this environment, donations were based on goodwill and long-term organizational survival depended on developing and sustaining relationships with core constituencies (Dees & Backman, 1995). Such dependence created strong horizontal ties and produced trust between the organization and the community (Backman & Smith, 2000). At that time, NPOs were able to “to point to their nonprofit status as ipso facto evidence of their trustworthiness” (Salamon, 1999, p. 13). The label alone signified trust.

As in society-at-large, early scholarship on the nonprofit sector accepted trust as a given. Much of the theory behind the origin and use of the nonprofit as an organizational form was founded on the belief that NPOs are inherently trustworthy (Jeavons, 2001). One of the most popular, Hansmann’s theory of asymmetrical information (1980, 1987),

links the voluntary prohibition on profit distribution with public trust in nonprofits.

James and Rose Ackerman (1986) summarize Hansmann's findings thusly:

The nonprofit form is said to be more "trustworthy" and hence to have greater consumer and donor appeal, when monitoring is not possible, and in some cases this trustworthiness outweighs the difficulties in raising capital and maintaining productive efficiency that arise when owner/managers are not residual claimants. (p. 20)

In other words, in fields where it is difficult or impossible to demonstrate performance because it possesses an unobservable quantity or quality, "trust" is consequently needed instead (Salamon, 2003). As a result, Frumkin (2004) concludes, the sector operated on "good faith" (p. 101).

A series of high-profile scandals has recently challenged that faith and lifted the veil that concealed the actions of many NPOs (Herzlinger, 1996). For instance, in the late 1990's, a jury convicted William Aramony of fraud, money laundering, and filing false tax returns. Not long after, an embezzlement scandal forced the resignation of Robert Sasson and yielded criminal charges of grand theft and conspiracy. And in 2010, Senator John Cornyn launched a congressional investigation into the actions of Roxanne Spillett who collected over 1 million dollars in salary, bonus, lavish travel, and other perks while her organization posted a \$13 million dollar annual loss. While these individuals are not household names, the organizations they worked for are—The United Way of America, Goodwill, and The Boys and Girls Club of America, respectively. These and many other dramatic controversies (remember Jim and Tammy Faye Baker?) thrust the nonprofit sector into the public eye. The negative reactions generated by such scandals spilled over into broader public discussions about profitability in the NPVS and led to calls for heightened scrutiny (Kearns, 1996). However, these events provide only a partial explanation for the diminished trust in the NPVS.

Changes in how the sector is funded receive far less public attention but have had a much larger impact. Today, the U.S. government supplies an increasing proportion of nonprofit funds. Considering both fees and contributions, governmental subsidies now account for 29.8 percent of revenue for reporting public charities in 2009. This amount rises to 48.6% for human service organizations (Wing, et al., 2009). Overall, between 1977 and 1997, governmental support for NPOs increased by 195 percent (Salamon, 2002). The devolution and privatization of public programs, or the “hollowing of the administrative state,” as Millard, Provan and Else (1993) put it, began as early as the 1960’s, but more recently a growing reliance on competitive contracting in the provision of social services has facilitated the entry of for-profits into arenas where NPOs had traditionally held an advantage (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). Forced now to compete for funding, this shift has led nonprofits “to reexamine their reasons for existing in light of a market that rewards discipline and performance and emphasizes organizational capacity rather than for-profit or nonprofit status” (Ryan, 1999, p. 128).

As the pressure to perform has increased, dependence on governmental assistance has also resulted in requirements that nonprofit organizations become more transparent (Ospina, Diaz, & O'Sullivan, 2002). In order to receive funds, NPOs must comply with both governmental regulations and oversight. Today, government agencies do not award grants or contracts to providers “because of what they *are* but what they can *do* and how effectively they can do it” (Ryan, 1999, p. 129). As I discussed in the previous chapter, now NPOs are less concerned with their altruistic identity and more concerned with productivity. At a minimum, NPOs are faced with learning more about performance measurement, which has a long history of established procedures in internal management controls and evaluation in government (Hager & Greenlee, 2004).

Another factor affecting the trust quotient for NPOs is that they are receiving an increasing amount of funding from large, private foundations. In 2008, for example, foundation funding for nonprofits totaled \$45.6 billion, a 134 percent increase from 10 years earlier (Wing, et al., 2009). And the conceptual priorities of national foundations are shaping the expectations for NPOs. Frumkin (2004) believes that these foundations no longer see themselves as being involved in “charity” or in the amelioration of individual problems. Instead, foundation leaders envision their work as employing sophisticated and logical theories of social change. Along these lines, today’s foundations put out requests for proposals and make “investments” in programs. They expect to see their return on investment demonstrated. Frumkin (2004) asserts:

foundations abandoned the backwoods of charity in favor of scientific philanthropy and they brought the broader field with them. Aspirations of donors for greater effectiveness have increased, and some have even attempted to push philanthropy one step further...openly and aggressively embrac[ing] an increasingly ambitious, technocratic, and hard-nosed approach. (p. 129)

Not surprisingly, this approach elevates the importance of evaluation and benchmarking to new heights. Foundation funding, Frumkin (2004) contends, pushes NPOs to demonstrate “what the billions of dollars backed by good intentions have ultimately produced” (p. 99).

In a movement mirroring the shift in funding mechanisms, theoretical assumptions of trustworthiness have now been replaced by expectations of accountability—measured empirically for the most part. James and Rose-Ackerman (1986) and James (2004) point out the reasons why trust is no longer a given in the nonprofit sector: (1) it is predicated on unobservable qualities, making it difficult to test; (2) many NPOs have an undeniable interest in money; and (3) observation and counting are crucial in order to make NPOs accountable. These observations demonstrate not

only the heavy emphasis on measurement but also the association, even conflation, of trust with accountability. Both characteristics typify a reductionist approach, popular in contemporary scholarship, which narrowly interprets trust as a product of performance (see entire issue of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 2010 39, vol. 4, for example). A key challenge for modern NPOs is “being able to measure and then aptly convince others of the degree to which they are accomplishing their mission” (Lewis, 2005, p. 251). Kearns (2001) goes so far as to state that the field is caught up in an “epidemic of accountability fever” (p. 352).

I suspect that the changes in source and form of NPO funding and the parallel shift in scholarship are related, although in this current research I am most concerned with the effect that these new expectations have had on how NPOs *communicate* trust. If, as the research above has indicated, trustworthiness is now questioned more stringently than in the past, then trust is an ongoing issue that NPOs must continually address (Van Til, 2000). In what follows, I present the various and creative ways that NPOs now employ technical and rational action to do so. Specifically, adjusting to new expectations led to conspicuous efforts by NPOs to (1) quantify and construct social problems as “solvable;” (2) account for success with tangibles; (3) view growth, expansion, and replication as an unquestioned good; and (4) seek independent, third parties to certify their performance. Ultimately, I claim, each of these groups followed the following dictum: Output must be emphasized.

COMMUNICATING TRUST IN AN ACCOUNTABILITY ENVIRONMENT

Constructing social problems

In the Symbolic Uses of Politics, Murray Edelman (1985) suggests that political problems are never verifiable entities; they are always the products of social construction.

This statement reflects a commitment to the symbolic-constructionist position that reality is never a given but is constructed through language. Following this theory, events become ambiguous stimuli that present both opportunities and constraints for organizations. The process of naming imbues events with meaning (Zarefsky, 1993). Put differently, the power to persuade is in large part, according to Zarefsky, the power to define. Through the manipulation of scope and the strategic use of quantification in the newsletters examined, the NPOs were able to create the presumption that intervention produces measureable change, not merely the amelioration of individual suffering.

In general, NPOs in this study constructed social problems as solvable. They did so primarily through quantification, creating the impression that they were fighting concrete battles, an effective strategy for controlling scope. Audiences were encouraged to visualize large, complex problems as discrete units of data. Oftentimes, this meant that intricate societal troubles were described in ways that lack the complexity, ambiguity, and the long time-frame usually associated with social development work (Ebrahim, 2003). Not surprisingly, the resulting rhetoric I observed was overwhelmingly, and at times unrealistically, optimistic. This approach was particularly noticeable with social service and advocacy organizations.

Homes for Our Troops, whose mission is to build accessible homes for wounded veterans from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, offered a prime example of an organization that quantified, and therefore contained and reduced, the size of an overwhelming problem:

Since 2001, we have been a nation at war. Almost two million American troops have served in combat; many in multiple tours, more than 5,100 have been killed, and more than 35,000 have been seriously injured. Since our veteran's Day 2006 newsletter, over 6,000 more Servicemen and Women have been injured in Iraq and Afghanistan. ("Intro," 2008, April)

In this example, Homes for Our Troops focused on casualty numbers to make their point. In so doing, they ignored the genesis of the central problem to be solved and pointed to its symptoms—the causalities of individual soldiers. In effect, the problem described was even further contained to the service members’ need for adaptable housing (not healthcare, or other comprehensive services). Instead of asking readers to struggle with the root of the problem—the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—Homes for Our Troops presented a technical problem (adaptive housing) that could be solved by the generosity of their members.

As the above example illustrates, the rhetorical work of problem-definition lies at the heart of self-presentation of effectiveness and success. Edelman (1985) reminds us that, “the terms in which we speak of anything do more than designate it; they place it in a class of objects, thereby suggest with what it is to be judged and compared, and define the perspective from which it will be viewed and evaluated” (p. 131). Edelman’s work on poverty explored the public policy consequences of labeling. He illustrated how using the phrase “the deserving poor” brought forth, in Jarvis’ (2005) words, “new choices....Should the government help the ‘deserving poor?’ What should be done with the ‘undeserving poor’ (a rhetorical by-product of the deserving poor)?” (p. 23). Similarly, Gusfield (1989) traced how the labeling of alcoholism as a disease—rather than as a moral failing—simultaneously reduced the personal responsibility of the individual for his or her condition and gave rise to an entire body of knowledge used to train professionals with the skills necessary to help alcoholics. These authors show how the construction of a problem is often related to what, if any, solution might be deemed possible. By defining difficulties as concrete and technical in nature, NPOs implied that intervention produced resolution.

Through their newsletters, nonprofit organizations communicated their belief that most of life's problems are inherently remediable. As evidence of this conviction, the majority of the groups emphasized the causality and the feasibility of their work. This tendency gave the newsletters an optimistic, yet pragmatic, tone. According to Wilson and Arnold (1972) and Hart and Daughton (2005), arguments from causality emphasize the "relationships of causes to effects, effect to effects, and the adequacy of causes" (p. 66). This type of logic, in Hart's (1997) words, is "clean, clear, linear, and pragmatic" (p. 69). In essence, one would expect to find this type of argument, given how NPOs defined social problems. The pragmatic, optimistic tone of the newsletters also sprung from the use of feasibility as a primary driver of their work. The feasibility topos was advanced by local organizations dealing with relatively small issues as well as by large national organizations.

These optimistic tones emerged from NPOs involved in a wide variety of causes:

- Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation attempted to reduce the immensity of cancer by focusing on curing childhood cancer "one cup at a time." The problem of childhood cancer, they argue, is at once devastating and at the same time curable if enough resources can be generated to fight the disease.
- GENaustin was equally confident in its ability to eradicate low self-esteem in young women. "It is estimated that only 2% of women worldwide find themselves beautiful; and while this trend is disturbing, it is possible to reverse it by helping women and girls understand the differences between realistic and unrealistic standards of beauty" ("News 8," 2009, June).
- High school dropout rates were also described as eminently reversible: "CIS is seen as a solution that removes barriers and obstacles to success...and helps keep students in school" ("Communities," 2009, June).

The prominence of causal, feasible arguments left audiences with a sense that the groups were focusing on real-world problems leading to real-world solutions that could

(and would) be demonstrated. Absent in this highly “efficient” discourse was any discussion of how people actually felt about these problems. Instead, the optimism demonstrated by the NPOs in this study was hyper-rational, based not on faith but on external, empirically demonstrable conditions.

One could, of course, imagine a competing characterization of social problems. Because few of the nonprofits studied declared rapid change unlikely or located solutions in the human capacity to change, audiences were left with the impression that their work lacked moral value. When organizations chose another strategy, the tone of their rhetoric was strikingly different. These NPOs seemed to struggle to maintain the cheery optimism about intervention in the face of complex problems. For instance, Family-to-Family talked about the difficulty of adhering to the belief that poverty could be eradicated. The following statement appeared in the Winter 2009 edition of the newsletter:

Family-to-Family is a light for many in that tunnel of poverty, and we that are out here working in the fields, see it. The beam of hope, a little help toward the boost of self-esteem that some people need to know someone cares. You can’t measure that all right now, but one day you will. We will be able to see the after effects of the seeds that have been planted in the lives of the families that have made a connection...So someone said, “Are we making a difference?” Yes, you are and you really can’t imagine how great. But, one day...it will be made known to all to see. Poverty as we know it today will be a thing of the past. ("Reflections," 2009, December)

This author could have contextualized Family-to-Family’s efforts by reporting that hunger was being eradicated in the counties in which the organization operated. In fact, Janet Poppendieck (1998) suggested that most organizations speak about hunger, not poverty, because the former is more amenable to a quick and recognizable solution (e.g. food banks). Yet, by extolling the capacity to change, rather than empirical change itself, the above author stands on uncertain ground. Unable to see actual change now, she has to have faith that the work of Family-to-Family will be eventually manifested externally.

Such an argument strikes a spiritual tone and stands in sharp relief to the causal and empirical arguments typically stressed by the NPOs. But, interestingly, it too echoes the importance of verifiable results. In the world of modern NPOs, this author is almost apologetic that “you can’t measure it [results] right now” but, she assures readers, one day these changes will be made manifest. Ultimately, she argues, it is that manifestation that really counts.

How the organizations defined the problems/solutions they addressed also influenced the assessment of their effectiveness. As Gusfield (1989) observes, “Different language frames mean differing assessments and evaluations” (p. 431). That is, problems framed in regular, discrete units are more likely to submit to measurement by means of empirical devices. The very labeling of a problem provides both a methodology and an implied outcome for NPOs. By primarily talking about social problems and solutions in a scientific and verifiable way, correctives can be easily imagined and then, subsequently, results can be measured. But measured how? I turn to that question now.

Accounting for success

Success might be defined in a variety of ways. (The Oxford English Dictionary alone offers over 400 variants). But Bellah et al. (1996) assemble a particularly American, middle-class variant: “Success is measured in terms of the outcome of free competition among individuals in an open market” (p. 198). What makes this definition especially reflective of American cultural values? First, it interprets success as the result of competition. Wuthnow (1991a) points out that American culture teaches citizens from their earliest years to value the struggle for success. Respect for that struggle remains one of our most widely shared values, as any sports fan can attest. Another uniquely American middle-class belief is that success can be measured by outcomes. This

definition of success applies to both business and community life, argue Bellah et al. (1996):

in the case of middle-class professionals whose occupation involves the application of technical rationality to the solution of new problems, the correct solution of a problem or, even more, an innovative solution to a problem, provides evidence of “success” that has intrinsic validity. And where such competence operates in the service of the public good...it expresses an individualism that has social value.

In the nonprofit and voluntary sector, therefore, one might expect to see NPOs pursuing extrinsic effectiveness in an effort to set them apart in a competitive, crowded field.

Therefore, the tendency of nonprofits to promote instrumental achievements such as fundraising, the number of clients served, and the like, would be expected. And in my sample of newsletters, NPOs routinely reported easily measurable components of their work, as might also be expected. This type of reporting represented success at the most basic level—by the simple tallying of the number of people served. NPOs also presented behaviors such as detailed efforts devoted to planning and the use of scientific information in planning. The NPO newsletters were full of assessment-derived language, focusing on terms such as “alignment,” “outcomes,” “evaluation,” “modeling,” “consistent implementation,” and, of course, “effectiveness.” This type of planning and assessment does not necessarily result in the quantification of outcomes, but it can be regarded as “second level” instrumental behavior in that it “aims at the establishment, improvement, or expansion of systems of purposive-rational action” (Habermas & Shapiro, 1970, p. 81).

While government and foundation efforts to monitor NPOs’ effectiveness initiated an increase in empirically based reports and outcome measures, I found that NPOs that were not receiving institutional funding also employed this rhetorical

approach. For instance, one might be hard-pressed to detect a difference between the two examples that follow:

- For the 6th straight year, The Source provided free income tax preparation to employees, their families, and the community. During the 2009 tax season, The Source had 13 certified volunteers prepare returns for 390 individuals and families...clients saved a total for \$50,000 in fees; Refund totals in 2009: 390 returns were processed \$781,309 in total refunds, \$602,362 in federal funds; \$140,115 in state funds; \$5,279 in city refunds; [and] \$218,863 in earned income tax credits. ("Great outcome," 2009)
- The Martha's Way program graduated nearly 140 participants since our training efforts began. We recently surveyed our graduates to find out how our program has impacted their careers. The responses were very positive: 89% of clients praised the program curriculum for its quality and usefulness. And 62% of respondents stated that their family's financial situation has improved since they completed the program. ("Martha's way," 2007)

These examples, from the government-funded "The Source" and the privately financed "Christian Community Services," respectively, are remarkably similar. Both passages provide the public with a detailed numerical account that borders on hyper-quantification. Neither group argued from abstraction ("we promoted the common good"), opting instead for operationalization ("we met our quantitative target"). These comments indicate that the primacy of a technological/rational worldview extends beyond just those NPOs that receive government funding. These comments also provide poignant examples that "numbers have an unfortunate tendency to supersede other kinds of knowing" (Bronstein, 2007, p. 280).

In perhaps the ultimate testimony to the triumph of the head over the heart, the NPOs analyzed here ensured that their achievements were visible by operationalizing expressive outputs. The reframing of intangible outcomes which might otherwise resist classification as tangible objects was rampant. Donations were not treated by the NPOs

as abstract dollars tossed into an organizational abyss. Instead, \$50 became an hour of research ("Appeal," 2006, December) and \$1,000 provided 2 canopy tents for outdoor food fairs ("CCSC," 2009). Particularly intriguing was the transformation of volunteer hours into quantitative entities. In the following example from the United Way, the "Day of Caring" was, ironically, not described in caring terms. It was presented instead as an empirical transaction between organization and community, even down to the use of the (=) sign:

350 volunteers working on 21 projects around town = a lot of community help and impact...The volunteers, who totaled over 350, including hundreds from 18 companies tackled meaningful volunteer projects at 21 local nonprofit organizations throughout Austin. Their impact at the end of the day was nothing less than impressive. Volunteers put in an estimated dollar value of \$36,400 of volunteer hours in the community in one day. ("It's a wrap," 2009, May)

What all these examples express, albeit in different ways, is the reduction of people to numbers. When numbers become more important than people, NPOs risk being conflated with any number of profit-making companies. A century ago, the suggestion that NPOs treat people not as individuals but as numbers would have been unthinkable. Try to picture, if you will, Mother Theresa making the statements above. However, if one looks at the largest (and by quantitative measures the most successful), examples of modern NPOs—hospitals and universities—this observation does not sound at all extreme. The public has come to accept that for these organizations, it is all about the numbers, their nonprofit status notwithstanding.

Such acceptance marks a major departure from the traditions that confined empiricism to explanations of the external world while compassion, morality, and religion were relegated to private life. Philosophers Marcuse, Ellul, Ortega and others believe that this separation was central to an enlightened society. Their concern over the progression of excessive rationality was summarized by Hanks (2009): "technological

values of order, quantification, and efficiency trump other concerns [and] are a very real threat to other human values (such as love, care, respect, or moral autonomy)” (p. 170). One can only imagine what this group of thinkers would say about the above examples. At the risk of putting words in their mouths, I suspect that their response would go something like this: the personal, a place that once served as a site of resistance, has been colonized by a technical logic.

Going to scale

Given this emphasis on numbers, the valuing of size as an ideal manifestation of success is a natural progression. In his discussion of venture philanthropy, Frumkin (2004) suggests that size is yet another way to measure outcomes and gain the trust of audiences. He asserts that “achieving it is a sign of success and relevance and that creating organizations that go to scale is a legitimate and worthy goal” (p. 102). According to the principle of scale, if programs are successful they can (and ought to be) replicated and expanded to meet the needs of more than just a few individuals. Frumkin (2006) identifies five operational definitions of scale: (1) financial strength; (2) program expansion; (3) comprehensiveness; (4) multisite replication; and (5) accepted doctrine (p. 204). He comments that in practice, however, these meanings can overlap.

The NPOs analyzed in this study sought to demonstrate that they were capable of “getting to scale” by documenting progress in all five categories. Financial strength and fundraising prowess were discussed ad nauseum. Replication and accepted doctrine were topics primarily found in newsletters of larger, established organizations such as Communities in Schools and advocacy organizations. Program expansion, however, was by far the most popular topic. The following announcement from GENaustin typified the approach used:

GENaustin expands to include Eanes, Hays, and Leander Independent School Districts. After successfully expanding into Manor, Del Valle, Round Rock and Pflugerville ISD's last fall, GENaustin is pleased to announce its continued expansion into Eanes, Hays, and Leander Independent School Districts this month. GENaustin will reach six more Central Texas middle schools with its Girl Talk and clubGEN programs, making its services available to hundreds of girls in the new districts. ("GEN expands," 2009, January)

Americans, it seems, have a natural awareness of scale in the market. One knows that Walmart, for instance, is successful because its stores can be found on every street corner and because its profits are always increasing. The U.S. is preoccupied with growth. "Bigger is better," "more is better," and the like are familiar phrases. Perhaps the public's immediate recognition of growth as being important can be located in the country's expansionist mindset. Nonetheless, expansion and growth, according to Cheney and Frenette (1993), "is presumed to be rational for all people in all situations" (p. 65).

Heralding growth might be expected in an emerging organization like GENaustin that deals with a problem (self-esteem) that renews itself with each generation. Yet it was interesting to note that the Voices for September 11th, a group that might be predicted to shrink in size as its catalyzing event becomes more distant in time, did not question the idea that bigger was better. Fully eight years after September 11th, 2001, Voices told its members that: "Our goals for the coming year are ambitious—to broaden our outreach for the 9/11 Living Memorial Project; to promote the recommendations for the 9/11 Commission and the WMD Commission and expand our support of the 9/11 community nationally and internationally" ("Dear," 2009, January). During the period examined here, the group also announced the opening of a new office and an expanded number of 9/11 Living Memorial workshops ("Dear," 2009, July; "Dear," 2009, October).

Edelman might identify Voices' unexamined growth as a solution in search of a problem. Years after the catalyzing event, Voices had a solution: a vast network of

councilors and donors. What it lacked was an increasing number of recipients. To meet the expectation of continued growth, it had a limited number of choices. In this case, Voices opted to create a need for more comprehensive services in an attempt to remain relevant.

In these examples, what is left unsaid is the possibility that growth may not be in the best interests of the organizations' members or of society as a whole. Valuing size, that is, might displace other values like intimacy, warmth, and camaraderie. Such personal values stand in sharp relief to the "impersonal façade of big government or the utilitarian mentality of big business" (Wuthnow, 1991b, p. 235). This raises an important consideration for the sector as a whole. On the one hand, growth helps to meet demand and, as Cheney and Frenette (1993) show, this manner of defining issues pervades corporate organizations. But if values of caring, diversity, and compassion are to be preserved, NPOs must certainly consider the potential drawbacks. The organizations reviewed in this study, however, rarely did so. Such unquestioned acceptance of growth and faith in the process of replication is yet another subtle reminder of the underlying technical logic found in the organizations studied here.

Objective organizations certify performance

Finally, I observed that contemporary nonprofit organizations presented themselves as trustworthy by becoming associated with objective, independent entities. Modern Americans from all walks of life now scour Internet sites like Charity Navigator, The American Institute of Philanthropy, The Better Business Bureau, and GuideStar for information on NPOs. One of the most popular, Charity Navigator, even welcomes visitors to their website with the following promise: "Find a Charity you can Trust" (CharityNavigator.com, n.d.). In the last decade, scholars have studied the rise of so-

called “watchdog” groups within the NPVS, evaluating the criteria these organizations use to rate charities (Hager & Greenlee, 2004), comparing the information these groups offer (Stork & Woodilla, 2007), and testing their impact on giving (Chhaochharia & Ghosh, 2008). How NPOs are using this information in their own communication efforts had yet to be explored.

Generally speaking, recognition by these groups was used by NPOs to symbolize objectivity and it is heralded as a way to reduce biased interpretations of the effects of social interventions and to demonstrate organizational effectiveness. It is perhaps an understatement to say that NPOs welcomed the endorsements of organizations such as the Better Business Bureau, Independent Charities of America, and Charity Navigator. The logos of all these groups were found among the newsletters examined. Of the 21 organizations studied, 15 had at least one logo. Two national organizations, Communities In Schools and Homes for our Troops, had all three. Typically, these images were prominently displayed on either the first page of the text or adjacent to the NPO’s name and address on the postage label.

The methodological rigor of the Independent Charities of America was the focus of Homes for Our Troops when proclaiming that they had been awarded the “Seal of Excellence”:

The Independent Charities Seal of Excellence is awarded to the members of Independent Charities of America and Local Independent Charities of America that have, upon rigorous independent review, been able to certify, document, and demonstrate on an annual basis that they meet the highest standards of public accountability, program effectiveness, and cost effectiveness. Of the 1,000,000 charities operating in the United States today, it is estimated that fewer than 50,000, or 5 percent, meet or exceed these standards, and, of those, fewer than 2,000 have been awarded this Seal. Our CFC # is 12525. (March, 2009)

Like the example provided above, NPOs drew on the credibility of watchdogs as independent auditors with formal evaluation procedures rather than on the personal experiences of organizational members. In justifying this development, Bornstein (2007) writes: “Every field has its arbiters of quality: Society enlists people to analyze and judge movies, books, restaurants, architecture, gymnasts...why shouldn’t society also have professionals whose job is to ‘review’ the performance of citizen organizations?” (p. 281). Interestingly, science does not make his list. I contend that this tactic actually mimics the ultimate goal of scientific research—that one’s results pass muster among reviewers. In the sciences, however, there is a strong tradition of peer review. No such process existed in the nonprofit sector and so it was necessary to invent one, with groups like Charity Navigator and the Independent Charities of America now occupying that void.

Taken together, when defining problems, offering solutions, and measuring success, the newsletters examined in this study highlighted the concrete and the tangible. The empirical impulse gave their rhetoric an optimistic and yet pragmatic tone. Audiences were encouraged to trust NPOs because of their demonstrable effectiveness and the endorsement of experienced outside auditors. Each organization abided by a reinvented Golden Rule: Output must be emphasized.

The discourse I have just described embodies Habermas’ (1970) definition of purposive-rational action:

governed by technical rules based in empirical knowledge. In every case they imply conditional predictions about observable events....These predictions can prove either correct or incorrect. The conduct of rational choice is governed by strategies based on analytic knowledge....[and] realizes defined goals under given conditions. (p. 91-92)

In short, these rhetorical behaviors constituted a model of technical rationality in the nonprofit and voluntary sector. Instead of chaffing under this new requirement and contesting the adequacy of empirical measurement, the NPOs studied here fully encouraged this frame. In effect, they became co-conspirators. Why would NPOs choose instrumentality over other potential approaches? The magnetic pull of empiricism could not be refused because Americans live in a zone of assessment, or so the theory goes.

THE PULL OF EMPIRICISM

Warnick and Inch (1994) write that among the strongest tendencies in American culture is “to value the ‘objective’ over the ‘subjective’, or the ‘ends’ over the ‘means’” (p. 204). One need not be a rhetorical critic to sense that their observation is correct. A casual viewer of prime-time television might reach the same conclusion. On any given evening, one is likely to see several programs dedicated to “ranking” something; multiple crime dramas featuring forensic detectives; and advertisements for “scientific” dating services that employ a computerized personality assessment instead of a yenta for matchmaking. The empirical impulse is deeply entrenched within the U.S. because it attaches easily to American individualism, is supported by a culture privileging the scientific, and satisfies what Minnick (1968) calls the theoretical desire to be “reasonable, to get the facts, and make rational choices” (as cited in Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 239).

From this perspective, it is possible that the prevalence of instrumental thinking witnessed here is merely a rehashing of scientific philanthropy. This post-Civil War movement sought to bring discipline to charity through a rational understanding of the “machinery of benevolence” (Bremner, 1988, p. 86). As Bremner (1988) points out, however, the scientific philanthropists of the late nineteenth century took a moral

approach, concentrating on the “dos” and “don’ts” and evaluating the worthiness of recipients. In contrast, the importance of altruism today is more likely to be expressed in rational, economic terms. That such an emphasis might be attributed to the condition of moral uncertainty is an idea I will revisit in a later chapter. For now, I consider a related, but additional possibility—that empiricism aides in the search for predictability in an unpredictable world.

Providing instrumental outputs to audiences has gained a strong foothold within these groups because it offers reliability. Currently, assert Hagar and Greenlee (2004), the citizenry is “a hungry audience who want to know whether a candidate for their money is stable or unstable, usual or unusual, and efficient or inefficient in their financial arrangements” (p. 92). As a priori assumptions of trust in the NPVS erode, people may be less willing to take risks and demand greater protection against the possibility of betrayal (Kramer & Tyler, 1996). The increased protection against some is surely a rational conception of trust. When viewed through an empirical lens, the world is made up of regularities. Believing that one can predict the actions of a corporation (or of an individual) based on their record of performance gives the American public a kind of reassurance that resonates with many long-standing cultural predispositions.

CONCLUSION

David Zarefsky (1993) notes that “many values tend to have widespread acceptance in our society and culture, until they come into conflict with other equally accepted values” (p. 255). He concludes that such battles are likely to result in an imbalanced value system. At both a methodological and a philosophical level, the nonprofit and voluntary sector is now in danger of becoming unbalanced. For instance, a recent volume of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (2010) dedicates an entire

issue to a symposium on “Accountability and Performance Measurement.” The questions explored include: “Does performance measurement improve strategic decision making?” “What is the Funders Role in Performance Reporting Mandates?” and, “How can collaborative capacity be linked to performance measurement in government-nonprofit partnerships?” One question that is not directly asked in the issue is this: “Has performance measurement gone too far?” As NPOs focus more and more on creating a rational basis for trust, they paint a distorted picture of the NPVS. A landscape that ignores that which cannot be easily measured leaves a large part of the sector unrepresented (and perhaps the entire sector misrepresented).

In this incomplete tableau, religious groups are almost invisible. Wuthnow (1991a; 1991b; 2004) argues that religion is an important, but neglected, part of the NPVS. In sheer size, there are 10 times as many churches as post offices in the United States and more people participate in religious groups every week than in any other civic association (Wuthnow, 2004). Communities of faith have been tapped to provide solutions for public problems and these organizations clearly shape political and public decisions. Religion provides the motivation and foundation for much of the voluntary work done in this country. Yet, as Wuthnow (2004) argues, “we have few answers about what religion is doing or is capable of doing” (p. 2). The marginalization of religious nonprofits amounts to what Mason and Harris call an “embarrassed silence”(1994). The silence is due, at least in part, to methodological difficulties. Because religious groups habitually defy the tidy performance measures that have become the norm in the social sciences, the public vision of these groups is easily obscured.

Perhaps even worse, the prevalence of empiricism within NPOs upsets an important philosophical balance between the instrumental and the expressive as well. Commitment to science, for Weber (1946):

Means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or import the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform this service. (p. 139)

When the world is reduced to rationalized codes and rules, it loses symbolic richness (Best & Kellner, 1997). Harkening back to the quote by Einstein that opened this chapter, “everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.”

This eventuality also concerns Berger (1986), who presciently describes the modern world as “cold.” He writes that the modern individual is involved with “countless relations with other people that are based on calculating rationality...superficial...and inevitably transient...There is an overwhelming need for a world of ‘warmth’ to balance all this ‘coldness’” (p. 113). Historically, Americans have found this warmth in the nonprofit sector; if NPOs cease to provide this balance, the quality of life in the U.S. could be forever harmed.

Reflecting again on the Cub Scout mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I wanted to tell little Aiden everything I had learned recently. Instead, in an attempt to restore a little of the lost magic, I gave him a donation and said that I did not need popcorn in return. I gave him the money because I believed in him and his cause. One wonders if such an attitude makes me an alien in my own times.

Chapter 5: Hierarchy: Pluralism versus Professionalization

“Maybe you wanted more of a Mary Poppins and less of a Jack Welch.”

--Deposed Red Cross Director, Dr. Bernadine Healy

INTRODUCTION

Over two thousand years ago, a small charitable organization of twelve disciples and the One they followed gathered for a last supper. They had all sworn allegiance to their leader and his vision of change. Over cups of wine, this man predicted that one of them, the disciple named Peter, would deny their association three times before the rooster crowed. The prediction came true and a trial and public crucifixion followed. The guilt and despair Peter felt in the dark days after the loss left the whole organization's mission in doubt.

The imagery contained in the ancient tale above is draped over the modern Red Cross. Although this NPO is anything but a small charitable organization, the Red Cross has walked in Peter's shoes, publicly denying their charismatic leader with a vision for change in the wake of controversy. Peter's guilt was Red Cross Board Chair David T. McLaughlin's guilt as he handed Bernadine Healy over to a mob of reporters, a treacherous prosecutor, and an angry Congress.

The events leading up to Peter's denial are well known, but the story of Bernadine Healy may not be as familiar. When Healey was hired as the executive director of the Red Cross, she was held up as the organization's savior. Healey brought to the table an impressive professional resume and medical background. She commanded respect. Her goal was to light the way to modernization and efficiency and the organization waited to see what miracles she could perform. When Healy planned to set aside \$260 million

of the \$564 million raised for its September 11th Liberty Disaster Fund to plan for “emerging needs” and future disasters, the decision led to the public symbolically calling for her own blood and, in the same vein as a Passion play, it ended with a crucifixion of sorts. Healy was terminated and the Red Cross publicly renounced her position. Thenceforth, one hundred percent of donated funds would go directly to the victims of 9/11.

Healy’s actions might have been in the best interest of the overall “health” of the organization but veteran Red Crossers felt threatened by Healy’s vision of the NPO as a modern, efficient, professional organization. Healy had claimed that “Charity is no longer an exchange between the non-needy and the needy. It is an exchange between the non-needy (donors) and the non-needy (the charity workforce) to provide services to the needy” (Pallotta, 2008, p. 25). New York’s Attorney General Elliot Spitzer saw it differently. He told Congress:

I see those funds being sequestered into long-term plans for an organization not being spent on victims. I hear words like continuity of operations, reserves, reprogramming, and we have two victims here at this table who haven't received the money they need. This is anathema to what the American public expects. (*"Charitable"*, 2001)

Healy was called an “outright fraud” by a member of the United States House of Representatives during congressional hearings (*"Under pressure,"* 2001). The New York Times put it best: “Would the Red Cross be overtaken by bloodless professionalism?” (Sontag, 2001, December 23).

This case represents a rare instance of public debate about the changing organizational values of NPOs. The replacement of volunteers by a growing number of nonprofit professionals raises difficult questions about hierarchy and power but public discussion on this topic is minimal (Clemens & Minkoff, 2007). Silence is only a sin of

omission but silence binds NPOs to a set of conflicting expectations and values that are difficult, if not impossible, to uphold. NPOs are now placed in the paradoxical position of appearing to adopt general management principles and reject formal organizational structure. One wonders, then, why NPOs would be as quick to deny professionalization as the disciple Peter denied his Lord: Perhaps it is because organizations such as the Red Cross cannot see their own sinfulness. Peter, realizing what he had done, confessed his guilt and received forgiveness. I argue that the contemporary culture prevents NPOs from doing the same. However, if they remain blinded by tradition it is not clear that the NPVS will, like Peter, receive a second chance. In this chapter, I investigate the possibilities for redemption.

THE SPECTER OF PROFESSIONALISM IN THE NPVS

Scholarship in managerial professionalism might have aided Bernadine Healy's defense. Research in the field holds that increased professionalism is a natural outcome of competition and heightened accountability. As I have argued in the previous chapters, NPOs largely embraced these trends. Meeting these new challenges, the managerial professional argues, requires a workforce experienced in marketing large organizations, administering government grants, producing sophisticated outcome measures, and managing costs and projects. Hierarchy is, therefore, a potentially powerful resource. Hierarchical organizations can more effectively manage the predictability of outcomes, have an easier time producing reporting and control measures, and they tend to be more stable as well (Pratt, 2001). Elisabeth Clemens and Debra Minkoff (2007) summarize the benefits thusly: "the more organization, the better the prospects for mobilization and success" (p. 155).

If this is the case, Healy and the new class of nonprofit professionals can be assumed to be well-meaning and their ambition to bring the “best” management tools to bear on social problems genuine. Such discipline can inject rigor into the sector, build a body of expert knowledge, and stave off the negative connotation of “amateurism” that has plagued NPOs in the past (Ellis & Noyes, 1990; Frumkin, 2001).

While the application of management principles in the nonprofit context is not in-and-of-itself bad, there are drawbacks. Critics argue that managerial professionalism reifies a new type of expertise in the NPVS—pragmatic expertise. As the number of volunteers declines and as paid staff becomes more prominent, some scholars worry, management experience will replace personal experience. Brown et al. (2000) illustrate this point with social workers. Long-regarded as established nonprofit “professionals,” their training emphasized a deep understanding of social problems. In contrast, the university and vocational not-for-profit management programs that proliferate today (often located in business departments) teach streamlining and improving nonprofit operations (Brainard & Siplon, 2004). A study of lay administrators in Catholic hospitals questions how this has changed what now constitutes appropriate preparation for work in the NPVS:

In terms of background and skills, have business, financial and marketing skills taken precedence over skills in theological reflection and ethical decision-making? Are lay board members expected to learn about or be versed in theology and or/the delivery of health care services as much as sisters are expected to be able to read financial statements? (Wittberg, 2006, p. 153)

The problem is that “pragmatism, as opposed to truth and love,” writes Milosky, “tends to produce distinctive organizational structures that close off broad-based participation” (1987, p. 280). Milosky might argue that the Red Cross made the proper

decision and only by resisting the temptations of bureaucracy and hierarchy can NPOs protect pluralism.

Institutional theorists would portray such a suggestion as naïve and unrealistic. According to this line of thought, bureaucratic, hierarchical organization is inevitable and resistance to it is futile. Even progressive organizations such as social movements end up reenacting hierarchies (Kleinman, 1998). Michaels (1966), for example, sees little hope for alternative groups such as NPOs that wish to preserve democratic, participatory ideals (Cheney, 1995; Michels, 1966). His famous “Iron Rule of Oligarchy” posits that as organizations increase in size, control by the few is unavoidable. Simon (1976) is not as bleak. He too, however, cautions that the struggle for survival often displaces collective goals within the organization. The public accepts, even encourages, this behavior in business and government because for-profit entities are expected to pursue growth and accumulate wealth and power. But for NPOs, institutionalization can be dangerous. What accounts for the difference? Jeavons (1992) believes that when NPOs institutionalize, discontinuities arise because espoused purposes (mission) conflict with operative purposes (organizational survival). The oft-repeated claim that “no money, means no mission,” is an attempt to deal with this conundrum. Hall (2001) forwards another possibility; Institutionalization in the nonprofit sector is problematic because it “has traditionally been looked to as a fundamental source of social and cultural diversity” (p. 91).

Institutionalization, however, need not always imply the suppression of participation and engagement (Clemens & Minkoff, 2007). According to Cheney (1995), formal organization can be conducive to solidarity goals if “the values of the organization and their pursuit [are] available to both members and outside observers for critique and debate. In particular, sacred notions of democracy and participation must themselves be

open to criticism” (p. 178). Cheney’s study of worker co-ops in Mondragon, Spain documents attempts to maintain such openness amidst growth, maturity, and competitive pressures. This line of research offers NPO administrators, like Healy, a potential lifeline. Perhaps more frequent and open communication with board members and volunteers could have saved her.

Recently, institutional scholars have shifted their attention from individual organizations to the external forces that shape entire organizational fields. Neo-institutionalists attribute organizational change to the process of isomorphism. Initially, organizational fields display a great deal of diversity. However, as the field becomes established there is a push toward homogenization. “Over time,” writes Wittberg (2006), “the combined effect [is]... a hospital, a college, or a social agency tends to increasingly resemble all of the other hospitals, colleges, or social agencies—religious or secular—in its organizational field” (p. 14). Three types of mechanisms facilitate the process: (1) coercive pressures derived from law, (2) mimetic pressures arising in times of uncertainty, and (3) normative pressures resulting from professionalization (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). All three pressures are present in the contemporary NPVS. For the current discussion, normative pressures are most salient.

The key sources for normative pressures are formal educational programs, a cognitive base in academia, and professional networks. Such mechanisms, assert DiMaggio and Powell (1983), “create a pool of almost interchangeable individuals who occupy similar positions across a range of organizations and possess a similarity of orientation and disposition that may override variations in traditions and control” (p. 152). Despite its long history, the development of normative pressures in the NPVS is a relatively new phenomenon. Nonprofit academic programs, journals, and associations

did not emerge until the 1970's (Hall, 2001). As members of an organizational field, then, NPOs are still becoming self-aware.

Because the field is relatively young, scholars should pay close attention to the process of professionalization. For instance, Bullis' (1993) investigation of the U.S. Forestry Service finds that professionalization produced a trans-organizational set of values that were often in conflict with local organizational commitments. Values are selected and adopted during the process of professionalization. In other words, the values held by "professionals" in the field shape the values of the entire field. As the NPVS matures into its own field, new "boundary-spanning" values are being developed. These values may compete, or possibly take precedence over, traditional values. If this is indeed the case, then the concern is not limited to national groups like the Red Cross with big staffs and budgets. This process can also affect all NPOs.

In sum, scholars do not know for certain if professionalization is a wolf in sheep's clothing that will devour voluntary association or if it will ultimately shepherd the sector into greener pastures. The forgoing research helps explain why NPOs are in a tenuous position but it does not fully answer a crucial question: "Is it possible to create a NPVS that is both professional and pluralistic?" Ambiguity about hierarchy was evident in the texts of the NPOs studied here. By calling attention to the scars left by the tension between professionalism and pluralism, I now ask: How did NPOs use rhetoric to reconcile seemingly contradictory values ushered in during an era of professionalization?

MASKING POWER

Feminine tone at the top

A good place to begin looking at how NPOs are handling hierarchy is at the top. Amernic, Craig and Tourish (2010) claim that CEO letters in corporate annual reports,

“establish an ideological frame for management control and reflect the culture and tone of a company” (p. 25). These authors find CEO letters to be inherently strategic and useful critical artifacts. To date, however, no one has examined similar letters in the nonprofit context. What messages are NPO leaders, CEOs, and executive directors sending to their members?

The not-for-profit executives studied here created intimate texts, with both women and men adopting a rather feminine “tone at the top.” Typically, each newsletter began with an introductory “letter” written by the highest-ranking member of the organization. The communication contained within it was consistent with Campbell’s (1989) classic definition of the feminine style as: intimate in tone, relying on personal experience and anecdotes, inductively structured and emphasizing audience participation, and encouraging identification between speaker and audience.

NPO executive letters were highly personal, self-disclosive and, on the surface, their letters often had little (or nothing) to do with organizational operations. Instead, these were “friendly” letters. Greeting lines solicited readers as “Dear friend” and closed “with love and gratitude.” The texts conveyed a feminine persona by relating the experiences of being a parent and spouse and, figuratively, by quoting authorities such as Oprah Winfrey. Whether or not the reader and author ever had met, letters like this one from NTEN Executive Director Holly Ross assumed a strong personal bond:

I confess: I’ve never once sat through an entire NTC session. My favorite part of the conference is the thousand conversations I have while dashing from here to there or over a drink at one of the many social events. For me, the conference is all about you. ... And when you get into the actual sessions in San Francisco, make sure you take notes for me. I’ll be gossiping in the hall. (“Intro,” 2009, January)

This piece is feminine to the hilt. First, what could be been more intimate than a “confession”? Next, Ross quickly reminds members that her role is relational—she’ll be

at the social events. Like rank-and-file members, she trades anecdotes in the hall. Finally, Ross invites the audience to participate by taking notes for her.

Former General Electric CEO Jack Welch's annual report letters never included confessions and were not signed "with love and gratitude" (ALSF, Summer, 2006). Amernic, Craig, and Tourish (2010) found that Welch, like other corporate CEOs, typically adopted a masculine style. Male communicators are hierarchical, dominating, and oriented toward problem-solving (Dow & Tonn, 1993). Analysis of Welch's rhetoric over a twenty-year period identifies him as "strong, resilient, confident, canny, omniscient, smart, militaristic, and aggressive; and with employees who are regarded as subservient resources rather than human beings" (Amernic, Craig, and Tourish, 2010, p. 46). Given this characterization, it is safe to say that corporate CEO's like Welch would think a personal, self-disclosive style inappropriate in the for-profit realm.

What, then, attracts nonprofit professionals to a feminine style? The obvious answer is that women are traditionally associated with caring. However, Dow and Tonn (1993) suggest a more interesting possibility. The authors contend that the feminine style elides the barriers between public and private discourse; it is an alternative approach to the competitive, task-oriented, and deliberate behavior expected in the public sphere (Dow & Tonn, 1993, p. 293). From this perspective, adopting a feminine style can be interpreted as a way of minimizing, or reducing, the perception of hierarchy.

That NPO leaders always, without exception, remarked on the weather is a related finding deserving of at least a passing mention. The weather was, indubitably, the single most common topic in these letters. The mundanity and seeming unimportance of this chatter made it easy to dismiss. For the most part, the references were excruciatingly banal. LBJ Future Forum director Catherine Robb chirped: "Happy Groundhog Day. Of course, living in Austin, we already know what we will get—uncertainty. Mostly

spring/early summer, with a few days of winter mixed in, sometimes on the same spring day” (“Intro,” 2010, February).

Ironically, the organization whose director engaged in this palaver the least was the only group that might be assumed to be concerned about the weather—the Austin Herb Society. This observation suggested that these refrains were not really about the weather at all. The following statement from Debbie Bresette at the United Way confirmed this suspicion:

Two of my favorite things in my life are my garden and the community we share. Right now, in October, I am celebrating and taking delight in both, because each space is surprising me with wonderful things. As we move into a wetter season, I am seeing all of the work I put into the garden during the hot, dry summer take fruit and bloom everywhere I look. (“President,” 2009, October)

Debbie signaled something deeper here. The weather was a nurturing metaphor for organizational growth. At the very least, constant reference to the weather was a way of addressing the audience as peers (as in “how’s the weather?”) and not as a superior, tonalities that are the very hallmark of this feminine style (Campbell, 1983). Feminine tone at the top, then, imbues the newsletters with collegial feeling. No CEO here, just a friend. But one needs to look deeper at how and why this tone develops.

Obscured authorship

Cheney (1999) claims that answering the question of “Who represents the ‘real’ organization?” is crucial to understanding participatory democracy in organizations (p. 25). Figuring out, in his words, “who’s in the loop?” requires that researchers answer a few basic questions including: Who is and is not talking? What and how much are people saying? and What is not being said? (p. 25). All of these questions are instructive, but Hart and Daughton (2005) direct observers to pay particular attention to what is not being said. Silence indicates a group’s taken-for-granted premises and the authors advise critics

to “search for such missing elements since examining the unstated in discourse provides the most subtle understanding of rhetor-audience relationships” (p. 94). In this study, I found both what is not being said and who is not speaking to be especially revealing.

The most pronounced absence in the letters was the lack of an identifiable author. Generally, newsletters resembled the familiar format of print journalism; text was segmented into “articles.” There was one striking difference however—the articles did not include by-lines, with the exception of several membership groups (specifically the Women’s City Club, Cuban Numismatic of American, and Austin Herb Society). Nonprofits with full-time staff consistently omitted overt indications or reminders of who had authored the piece. NPOs also obscured authorship by printing anonymous questions-and-answers. For example, GENaustin asked one of its teacher/sponsors: “Why do you feel that gender-specific programs, as opposed to coed after-school programs, are so important?” (“Concerned,” 2009, June) and the Liberators queried: “I believe that many young people are attracted to selling drugs...Do you agree?” (“Ask,” 2009, September).

Q & A format seems inherently democratic and participatory. If one looks below the surface, however, it is a poorly kept secret that the organization is pulling the strings. The first question above strictly limited the number of possible responses. It assumed that the respondent believes that gender-specific after-school programs are superior and is only licensing discussion of why this is the case. That GENaustin provides such programming is really no surprise. The second question above provides a classic example of a leading question. Even as he or she asks “Do you agree?” it is clear that the unidentified “reader” anticipates the response. The Q & A only thinly masks the ideology of the NPO.

Interaction characterizes a truly dialogic approach. Brainard and Siplon (2004) show how grassroots groups use Internet “chats” to engage their members, thereby fostering highly decentralized discussions. In addition to voicing their support for the organization, the chatrooms also give members a place for disagreement. Of course, newsletters are unidirectional forms of communication. Imagining a more inclusive discourse in this format is difficult but not impossible. At a basic level, the NPOs examined here might have conceived Q & A’s as an opportunity for deliberation instead of as a platform for re-affirmation.

NPOs employed other strategies as well to create the perception that their members were speaking when, in reality, the organization controlled the conversation. Most groups reserved first-person pronouns for staff or other members of the organizational hierarchy. The executive director’s letters examined earlier are, for example, authoritative attempts to speak directly to members. The rank-and-file was not usually granted this privilege. There were notable exceptions, however. Family-to-Family and Veterans for Peace ran long, at times rambling, stream-of-consciousness reports from local chapters. But in the main, NPOs discussed member experiences in the third person. In effect, members’ voices were mediated.

For instance, GENaustin, a group dedicated to girl’s empowerment, recapped the annual GENuine Appreciation event thusly: “Also featured were three poems written by middle school girls during clubGEN. Their words, voices and positive affirmations demonstrate the struggles and joys of being a middle school girl” (“GENuine,” 2009, June). Professional poets the adolescent girls were surely not, but summarizing their thoughts and feelings in this way undoubtedly minimized their voices.

Mediation of members’ voices presents an issue of agency. The phenomenon is well-documented in studies of political journalism and can shed some light on the current

study. Media scholar Daniel Hallin (1992) traces the trajectory of the average political sound bite—the length of time given to showing candidates speaking as opposed to journalistic interpretation of what the candidate said—and finds that it has been shrinking since 1968. He concludes that candidates no longer dominate the news. Instead, political coverage is journalist-centered; reporters are now the active agents. If one applies this logic to the NPVS, the consequence of mediation may be that organizations will become the active communicator and individual members will increasingly assume a more passive role.

Granting everyone the right to speak for the group would make the organization more democratic but it can also produce chaos. The founders of American “democracy” expressed skepticism about completely democratic behavior, which is why they settled on a representative form of government with democratic elections. Hierarchy and bureaucracy clearly make things less messy. There is good reason to believe that volunteer members prefer such tidiness, a point raised by Ashkraft and Kedrowicz (2002). Their study of volunteers at a shelter for battered women advances the possibility that being “empowered” is of limited appeal. The authors write:

Our analysis...demonstrates how the staff's empowerment program although consistent with the dominate models of empowerment is at odds with the volunteers experiences...For volunteers, minimized hierarchy and increased responsibility and participation were neither necessary nor necessarily empowering. (p. 105)

Taken together, then, anonymous articles, disembodied Q & A's, and mediation of members' voices are all strategies that obscure who is really speaking. Appearances aside, the organizational hierarchy is clearly doing the talking. It is also true that one important group is thereby left out of the conversation—recipients. Unfortunately, this finding is not surprising. The finding that those who benefit from charity are rarely

invited to the discussion, is a clear challenge to the pluralism or sense of democracy one might expect from the NPVS (Wuthnow, 2004). The lack of voice from the beneficiaries confirms a point from Pallotta (2008) that I presented earlier, “Charity ... is an exchange between the non-needy (donors) and the non-needy (the charity workforce) to provide services to the needy” (p. 25). Similarly, the NPO newsletters illustrate the communication is between the non-needy and the non-needy. Now that we have examined who is speaking, a natural next step is to look at the narratives told by NPOs.

Giving back comes down to a single individual

Narratives are an important source of information. Stories reveal and conceal propositional content, not by explicit argument but through the beguiling logic of drama (Hart & Daughton, 2005). Jacobs and Sobieraj (2007) write that narratives do more than entertain; they also “provide templates for orienting and acting in the world: by differentiating between good and evil, by providing understandings of agency and selfhood, and by defining the nature of social bonds and relationships” (p. 5). In the context of NPOs, one might wonder, as Lewis (2005) does, what narrative structures give rise to social capital. Also, how do stories naturalize power within organizations?

An ideal story-type emerged from the newsletters I examined: the lone volunteer who makes a difference. Character names changed and settings shifted. I read about Lois in Myra, Kentucky (“Pam visits,” 2008, May) and Erik Freeman in Buena Vista, Colorado (“Volunteer,” 2008, May), but the central organizing principle remained the same. The story of Jillian Rossi captures the theme best:

Jillian Rossi is a remarkable teenager. A senior at Lehigh Valley Charter High School, Jillian organized a fundraiser for VOICES of September 11th that raised nearly \$800. It all began on September 11th, 2001, when Jillian realized that her beloved cousin might be at the World Trade Center. She and her family will never forget the panic they experienced. Fortunately, he was discovered safe and sound,

but Jillian was so frightened and moved, she felt enormous sympathy for all those who were lost, and all those who loved them. Her heart is still with them, and New York.

She remained true to her dedication when the time came to conduct her graduation project. At first she thought about having a school assembly, but she very quickly realized raising funds for victims' families would be more productive. After investigating various organizations, Jillian selected VOICES, and we are very grateful she did. A singer herself, Jillian enlisted the entertainment talent of Lehigh Valley Charter High School alum Kristen Morgenstern, another great singer, as well as local DJ Brian McKay and country artist Buddy B. She promoted the event on the radio, in church bulletins, and through word of mouth. The event was a huge success—sold out, with over 130 guests filling the hall. ("Innovative," 2009, January; "Innovative fundraiser," 2009, January)

As we see here, the audience first gets to know the central character, Jillian, on an emotional level. Once the connection is established, the hero is transformed into a classic rational actor; she is innovative, remarkable, true, and talented. Through research, she carefully selects the organization. Logic also determines the action—how Jillian makes a difference. A key moment of indecision occurs when Jillian abandons plans for a school assembly because fundraising is more “productive.” Above all, the story is agent-centered; Jillian attempts everything by herself. And, of course, she succeeds.

Is this a narrative that might give rise to social capital? Clearly, the story affirms democratic ideals of individual choice and freedom. But something important is missing here. Jillian's story lacks a “civic” component, failing to offer a sense that the community is also central to charitable works. More specifically, NPOs are the social support institutions that provide the resources needed for the performance of charity but this is an omitted storyline in the above example. In analyzing the parable of the Good Samaritan, Wuthnow (1991a) makes a similar point: “For most of us the story remains an illustration of individual compassion. We let it reinforce our individualism because we neglect even the institutional focus it once had historically” (p. 177).

The ideal story-type of the concerned individual restricts action on two fronts. First, this trope inhibits institutional understanding because the organizational role is obscured. Next, when interpreted from the perspective of critical theory, such a narrative masks materialism/power at the societal level as well. Applying Burke's (1950) dramatisic terms, the "concerned individual" narrative is properly located within the idealist school and features "agent" as the key term. The combination of idealism and agency, according to Burke, necessarily deflects attention from scenic and materialist concerns, thereby reaffirming the status quo and moving power offstage (Ling, 2000).

"Backstage power"

Power is happy behind the scenes, unacknowledged. Backstage is where it accomplishes some of its best tricks. However, power doesn't stay hidden for long; it finds a crack, then a doorway. In this analysis, hierarchy found its footing in a small, unassuming word—"we." Simple yet accomplished, the word "we" rhetorically creates and maintains constituencies. In this sense, "we" is the building block of shared identity. Beasley (2004) shows that "we" is a malleable term; its constituencies can shift and change over time. For instance, she recalls the gravity "we" adopted after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. On that day "we" meant "something larger, something almost ridiculously ephemeral that was somehow, on that day especially, overwhelming meaningful nonetheless. My September 11th 'we' was, in effect, the same 'we' of the U.S. Constitution, the monosyllabic signifier or a national political community" (p. 3). Certainly the "we" of "WE the people" is a sacred we.

Given the historic association with sacred democratic values, it was not out of line for the editors of *The Nonprofit Quarterly* (2001) to proudly claim that nonprofits "organize and speak on behalf of 'We the people'" (p. 3). But is that true? Regretfully, I

found that the nonprofits in this study often did not speak for the people. In their newsletters, the term was used more often to differentiate than to assimilate. NPOs used “we” to bifurcate the organization and its members. In short, these groups employed an organizational rather than a societal “we.”

The following quotations represented only a small sampling of the strategies just discussed:

- “While the Big Media conglomerates have billions, we have you” (“Free Press,” 2008, Spring).
- “You’ll learn about how we’re bringing together the top minds in the nation to find the policy fixes to the crisis in the journalism industry. You’ll find out how we’re pumping new life into community radio and public access” (“Media,” 2009, Summer).
- “To assist you in choosing the best person to lead the City we invite you to meet the candidates and hear from them directly about their priorities” (“Austin,” 2009, March).
- “We think of you as our family and we know that you want to see a cure for all childhood cancers as much as we do” (“What a year,” 2009, Fall-a).

These examples identify volunteer members as rhetorical outsiders. The pronoun “we” primarily applied to staff. This was universally true for organizations with paid positions. These groups have a choice between an organizational (staff-based) and a societal (comprehensive) “we.” The preference for the former not only appears undemocratic but also reveals an increasing gap between paid staff and rank-and-file members.

This rhetorical separation, I believe, is rooted in uncertainty surrounding organizational roles. As NPO staff become more professionalized, they may no longer represent the group’s ideology. Other identities (such as fundraiser, therapist, project manager) can quickly become more salient. The texts described here provide rhetorical proof of the processes of professionalization at work.

On the whole, the NPOs studied here went to great lengths to hide hierarchy. They did so by adopting a feminine “tone at the top,” obscuring authorship, and focusing on individuals, not organizations. In sum, these NPOs masked power, keeping it hidden offstage. But by no means were power and hierarchy absent. Hierarchy was manifested in unlikely places such as the employment of an organizational, rather than societal “we.” But why would NPOs reify hierarchy even while raising expectations that hierarchy did not exist? Perhaps it is because, despite manifold changes to the nonprofit sector workforce, Americans still cling to a romantic ideal of nonprofit behavior (Carson, 2002). As was argued in chapter three, the image of an altruistic, all-voluntary NPVS is part of the American cultural subconscious, with roots dating back to the arrival of early settlers in a new world. This leads me to ask: Was the scapegoating of Bernadine Healy preordained by Puritanism?

THE PURITANICAL IDEAL OF AMERICAN NPO BEHAVIOR

To understand the behavior of modern American NPOs, one must understand something of the Puritan legacy. Bercovitch (1993) describes its enduring imprint as:

a system of sacred-secular symbols (New Israel, American Jerusalem) or a people intent on progress; a set of rituals of anxiety and control that could at once encourage and confine the energies of free enterprise; a rhetoric of mission so broad in its implications, and so specifically American in its application...As a potential source of shared beliefs for Americans, then, the Puritans’ mission has imprinted itself on the lives of subsequent generations of Americans. (pp. 30-31)

Of those potential sources of shared belief to which Bercovitch refers, there is nothing of greater importance to the NPVS than Puritan self-sacrifice. John Winthrop laid out this doctrine in “A Modell of Christian Charity”: “But if our hearts shall turne away soe that wee will not obey, but shall be seduced and worship...other Gods our pleasures, and profits, and [serve] them;...wee shall surely perish out of the good Land whether wee

pass over this vast Sea to possess it” (as cited in Pallotta, 2008, p. 19). The premise of the sermon was concupiscence. Winthrop conflated man’s fall from grace with his insatiable, acquisitive propensities (Innes, 1995). He warned the early American colonists that self-interest needed to be contained. Winthrop and other Puritan spiritual leaders inspired the belief that charity is a penance for materialism. Distribution of surplus wealth atoned for the sin of self-interest, and voluntary association offered a moral counterweight to capitalism.

Importantly, writes Pallotta (2008), the Puritan Biblical tradition drew a line indicating that, “charity is necessarily segregated. It cannot use the same tools as commerce, it cannot use self-interest or profit as motivation. That would destroy its ameliorative and redemptive purpose” (p. 23-24). NPVS activity in the United States has always been premised on the possibility of removing, or at the very least minimizing, self-interest in human affairs.

Even today, nonprofits are bound to the Puritan principle of individual self-sacrifice. As I have demonstrated, adhering to the tenet of self-sacrifice means that NPOs cannot appear to be acting in their own organizational interest or of finding creative ways around this rule. The moral restriction on making money from charitable work also applies. “Your piety could come from your wealth,” writes Pallota (2008), “but your wealth could not come from your piety” (p. 23). This axiom still constrains outward displays of professional development. For instance, what else accounts for the moral outrage when the public learns that the Red Cross donations for September 11th may go towards organizational overhead or that the Executive Director of the Boy Scouts makes a salary comparable to his for-profit counterparts?

CONCLUSION

As the final example illustrates, NPOs are bedeviled by their own complexity. I refer here not to the complexity of solving social problems but to the culmination of competing demands resulting from efficiency, accountability, professionalism, democracy, and altruism. Nonprofit organizations are caught up in what Linda Putnam (1986) calls a system contradiction—when an organization’s practices (ways of getting things done) become incongruent with its structures. The old ways of getting things done in the NPVS meant relying on an amateur, but well-meaning volunteer workforce. However, modern nonprofit structures are more bureaucratic, hierarchical, and staffed by a growing number of professionals. “Paradoxically” best describes how NPOs respond to these contradictions. NPOs try to have it both ways and end up hamstrung by their own efforts. I have argued in this chapter that these groups attempt to mask power in order to retain democratic, pluralistic values and yet, at the same time reify, hierarchy in their language practices.

I began this chapter with the story of how Bernadine Healy was brought down at the Red Cross. It is appropriate that I close with it as well. Salamon (2003) writes:

The story of the nonprofit sectors’ response to the crisis of September 11 is emblematic of its position in American life more generally. Long celebrated as a fundamental part of the American heritage, America’s nonprofit organizations have long suffered from structural shortcomings that limit the role that they can play. (p. 3)

NPOs are, then, quintessentially American, a pure juxtaposition of strength and weakness, of good intentions and problematic practices.

Chapter 6: Mission: Innocence and Experience

“We are condemned to interpretation.”

--Paul Ricoeur

INTRODUCTION

Following in the footsteps of fellow billionaires, Mark Zuckerberg decided to give something back. In September 2010, at just twenty-six years old, the Facebook founder announced a gift of \$100 million dollars to establish a foundation aiding the failing Newark, New Jersey school system. Amidst critical funding shortfalls and declining educational performance, the donation represented a rare success for tens of thousands of struggling schoolchildren, the state of New Jersey, and the city of Newark. The youthful philanthropist, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, and Newark Mayor Cory Booker, gathered together on The Oprah Winfrey Show, the home of feel-good moments, to share the big news with a national television audience.

Most likely, the foursome expected a public reception similar to Bremner's (1988) description of big dollar gifts in an earlier era:

The outpouring of philanthropy was matched only by the praise heaped on it. From time to time, it is true, doubts were expressed...but critics of business civilization seldom questioned American generosity and defenders frequently boast of it. In 1928, a year which saw 500 lump-sum gifts of \$1 million or more, the Saturday Evening Post characterized the charitable zeal of business leaders as “a practical application of the golden rule.” “We work, and we work hard, not for the money itself, but for the good that may be done with it,” said the Philadelphia Inquirer in early 1929.” (p. 134)

Less than a century later, the response to Zuckerberg's gift was anything but enthusiastic. Instead of praising his largesse, the media insinuated that the donation amounted to little more than a public relations stunt to divert attention from the newly-released and less-than-flattering biopic, *The Social Network*. Commentators raised suspicion about the

timing of the donation, about Zuckerberg's *connection* to the recipients (he graduated not from public schools, but the elite Phillips Exeter Academy), and about the high-profile *setting* in which he made the announcement. CNN tech blogger Christopher Dawson summarized the alternative interpretation:

What better way to cement the brand with the parents who represent the fastest-growing group of Facebook users than to make the announcement on Oprah? It's not as if he's announcing it on Jimmy Fallon...I can't help but feel like the Newark Public Schools are being used as a publicity stunt. (2010, February 1)

Appearances, it seems, can no longer be believed. Even as Zuckerberg insisted that he had always been interested in education and had maintained a personal relationship with Mayor Booker, the press still questioned his motives—the donation did not signify altruism but was calculated to achieve other, less charitable, purposes. In short, the public preferred to accept the idea that there is no such thing as “just generosity” anymore (Heussner).

Why did early twentieth century Americans accept the motives offered by industrialists while twenty-first century citizens express deep skepticism about such accounts? The contrast suggests that today's citizens assume that appearance and reality are separated and that deceptions abound. Wuthnow (1991a) explains the process thusly: “Our accounts may seem pure and laudable and yet mask a dark side that unconsciously dominates our souls...Thus it is not any one account that we must treat with suspicion, but accounting itself: the whole currency must be devalued” (p. 62). Under these circumstances, the idea on which the entire nonprofit and voluntary sector is premised—altruism—comes under attack. How did we reach this point? In the following pages, I assert that a change in cultural forces encouraged by postmodernism has fomented a crisis of meaning with regard to the NPVS.

POSTMODERNISM AND THE CRISIS OF MEANING

As the example above illustrates, Americans inhabit a world much different from that of the 1920's. Postmodern theorists posit a culture that is fragmented, devoid of grand narratives, and, as a result, is increasingly cynical. While a full review of the effects of the postmodern turn in art, literature, architecture, etc. is beyond the scope of this study, several of its major tenets are critical to understanding how NPOs talk about purpose, meaning, and mission in today's world. Accordingly, my goal is to explain the relationship between the postmodern cultural turn and the struggle of traditional organizations such as NPOs. In particular, I examine the postmodern focus on breaks, fissures, and the erosion of boundaries that create a sense of rupture with the past (Best & Kellner, 1997).

The example of Mark Zuckerberg is an apt starting point for this analysis. Of the technological innovations that have changed the patterns of everyday life, social networking is arguably the most prominent. Celebrating as it does the removal of traditional barriers such as geographic space and by channeling an instantaneous pastiche of information (from Egyptian revolutionary agendas to some celebrity eating a donut), Facebook typifies the shattering of boundaries for which postmodernism is known. New technologies support the transformations and ruptures occurring in economic systems as well. The Internet is often implicated as the primary mechanism responsible for disassembling traditional divisions of labor and enabling outsourcing and other novel forms of production and distribution. In turn, the process of globalization and the ascent of the transnational corporation have hastened the demise of the solidary nation-state (Best & Kellner, 1997).

These large-scale changes have major repercussions at the organizational level. In the past, Kaufman (1960) could comfortably propose a unitary model of a homogenous

organization, as he did in his classic study of the U.S. Forest Service. He could never do so today. The organization can no longer be regarded as a contained system capable of shaping and maintaining individual values within its borders. In contemporary heterogeneous, global, teleconnected societies, the discourses available to individuals are greatly expanded. The stabilizing force of an organization is disrupted as it becomes the site of multiple and competing value claims arising both from within the group and from interaction with the broader society (Bullis, 1993; Deetz, 2001).

At the present moment, it is difficult to imagine the Enlightenment period where a consensus discourse reigned in science and society and when individuals were conceived of as autonomous and coherent, free of what Giddens (1991) calls “ontological insecurities” (p. 33). At that time, identity was theorized as relatively stable (Deetz, 2001). Postmodernists, however, reject “the notion of the autonomous, self-determining individual as the center of the social universe and in its place suggest the complex, conflictual subject with an emphasis on fundamental dissensus” (Deetz, 2001, p. 32). Human experience is now marked by exposure to multiple, sometimes conflicting, sets of values and ideologies (Bullis, 1993). Mackenzie (1978) eloquently reflects on the plight of contemporary existence:

“I” is to some extent context dependent. There may or may not be a unique and persistent identity resident somewhere in each of us: but certainly our individuality shifts a little according to context, chooses different words and gestures, gives priority to different interests, according to the “we” which temporarily has the upper hand in the social context. “I” is certainly not fixed and external. (p. 116)

As a result, identity itself becomes decentered and fragmented.

In addition, postmodernism articulates a break from the grand integrative narratives of the past. “Traditionally,” writes Deetz (2001), “the power of any social formation has been gathered from its grounding or foundation...positions based on such

foundations and narratives are made to seem secure and inevitable and not opportunistic or driven by advantage” (p. 34). In other words, human experience could be explained by embedding it within universal storylines such as humanism or religion (Deetz, 2001; Mumby, 2001). The totalizing tendency of modern thought, however, may no longer be sufficient. According to Conrad and Hayes (2001): “The postmodern world is simply too complex, too unstable, and too fragmented to be explained by *any* grand narrative or totalizing theory” (p. 65). For Lyotard (1984) the “incredulity of metanarratives” (p. xxiv) defines the postmodern epoch.

Growing incredulity toward metanarratives and the search for instabilities rather than homology and consensus contribute to public cynicism (Mumby, 2001). The cynic sees human conduct as wholly motivated by self-interest, always expects the worst, and shows little or no faith in fellow human beings (Eisinger, 2000; Hart, 1999). The cynical stance requires one to stand back and resist involvement; it is contemptuously distrustful of people and institutions (Hart, 1999). At present, cynicism has become an endemic part of the American psyche and its effects are far-reaching (Eisinger, 2000). Along these lines, Salamon (2003) observes that:

a serious fault line seems to have opened in the foundation of public trust on which the entire nonprofit sector rests...charitable organizations have become another special interest, regularly conspiring with government bureaucracy to escalate public spending, and doing so not so much out of real conviction about the needs being served as out of a desire to feather their own nests. (p. 29)

Although he would resist being labeled as such, Salamon offers a perfectly postmodernist description of the nonprofit sector. The imagery he uses is telling—“a serious fault line” in the “foundation of public trust” and the cynical desire to feather one’s own nest. These comments indicate that the fissures, breaks, and ruptures of the postmodern condition are erupting in the NPO sector. The preoccupation over the “blurring of boundaries” in

NPOs betrays the anxiety of a traditional culture bombarded by the threats and challenges of a postmodern worldview. For traditional organizations that have defined themselves in opposition to the outside world, Cheney (1991) suggests that battling between permanence and change can be especially difficult. Put another way, in “a world where...religion and successor ideas like aristocracy, community, and nationalism—have been dissolved” what are the rhetorical options for NPOs (A. Potter, 2010, p. 12)? In light of the “death” of assumptions of autonomy, faith, and trust, how might these groups talk about mission or purpose? I now turn to these questions.

MISSION AND MEANING

To begin, I feel compelled to clarify the term “mission.” Scholars of the nonprofit sector theorize that mission plays a more important role in NPOs than other organizations (Oster, 1995). In contrast to private organizations, an NPO’s mission can constrict responses to external change. For instance, a girls’ soccer team cannot become a food bank just because funding for that activity is more readily available (see Lewis, 2005; Minkoff & Powell, 2006). Mission also forces nonprofit organizations to embrace objectives that have different facets: providing a service *and* making a statement about the values that undergird their motivation for and commitment to service (Jeavons, 1992). As such, mission has a dual function in nonprofit organizations: (1) it lays out the goals and agendas of the group and structures how organizations go about contributing to the public good and (2) it serves as a clarion call providing a sense of purpose that energizes and justifies organizational existence (Minkoff & Powell, 2006).

To this point, my analysis has primarily dealt with the first function: chapter four spoke to how NPOs construct goals and chapter five presented the binds and complexities of organizational structure. Both chapters focused on the relationship between the NPO’s

goals and managerial and organizational performance (Young & Salamon, 2002). In this chapter, I turn my lens to the second dimension of mission—providing a sense of purpose. Earlier, in chapter three, I discussed the issue of identity and how the current milieu has contributed to a sense of fractured identity for the NPVS, here I investigate the claims NPOs make about their work, how their statements of purpose foster identification and induce participation (Swales & Rogers, 1995), and how mission might serve as a carrier of organizational ideology.

Although it sounds counterintuitive, a formal organizational mission statement is not necessarily the best site for this type of work. Formal statements of mission, while widely communicated, have been attacked for merely articulating what the organization does and not explaining why it does so (Collins & Porras, 2002). Fairhurst, Jordan, & Neuwirth (1997) make just this distinction. The authors encourage researchers to move beyond formal mission statements and look at how organizations “manage the meaning of the mission” in everyday communication. Here, I will examine what Hart (1984) refers to as “quietly affirming moments of discourse” (p. 749). This chapter is, therefore, not about formal mission statements but about statements of mission, statements expressing a group’s *raison d’être*.

The central question of this chapter is this: “How are traditional organizations such as NPOs coping with cultural trends that fundamentally challenge the underlying concepts of meaning and purpose?” I argue that the milieu of the late 20th and early 21st century has left distinctive rhetorical scars on how the NPOs manage their articulations of mission. Specifically, these groups posit a postmodern audience by constantly and overtly discussing motive, reifying the “real,” and providing explicit warrants for group participation. As a result, purpose can no longer be presupposed.

PURPOSE CAN NEVER BE PRESUPPOSED

Motive is never not at issue

As Mark Zuckerberg learned while making a generous contribution to a failing school system, motive is never not an issue. Actions alone are no longer solely judged. In fact, motive—why people do what they do—is a major function of discourse (Burke, 1950; Hart & Daughton, 2005). Human beings are naturally curious about others, a tendency exploited by modern communication. Television, for instance, nurtures in the public a “second sense” about motive, constantly “inviting viewers to examine—and judge—how people behave” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p.263). This urge carries over to charitable behavior, argues Wuthnow (1991a):

It is not simply enough to “be motivated,” as we say; not enough to find ourselves in some situation that prompts us to engage in an act of kindness. We must also have a way to talk about our motivations. We must have a language to explain to ourselves and others why we are doing what we do. (p. 50)

What language might one expect a nonprofit organization to use when explaining its behavior? The extensive literature on volunteer motives suggests two common possibilities: (1) utopian explanations that signal higher principles—“God” in religious terms and the “goodness” of human nature for secularists; or (2) utilitarian accounts that stress the results of an action (“it makes me feel good”) and other psychological or material benefits (Wuthnow, 1991a). In selecting from a “vocabulary of motives” to explain behavior, (e.g. choosing the language of the Golden Rule to frame an organization’s mission over, say, its economic benefits), an organization presents its values to the public (Cheney & Frenette, 1993). This process of “choice making” typically goes unnoticed (Hart & Daughton, 2005). By calling attention to this process, it is possible to gain an understanding of what an NPO values and how these accounts connect with society-at-large.

NPOs supply their audiences with abundant motivational discourse. Not surprisingly, both utopian and utilitarian reasoning are represented. Predictably, newsletters contain deeds done in the name of virtue—"we are blessed so that we can be a blessing to others"—and self-interest—"You can get your exercise all while helping work towards a world without breast cancer" ("Civic," 2007, April; "Vigorous," 2009, January). Interestingly, some groups in my study collapsed these categories and attributed multiple motivations to explain a single charitable act. Such was the case when the religious organization CCSC offered the following reasons for why one of their members, Margaret, joined its ranks:

Margaret says they were particularly impressed with the organized approach taken to help people, with a screening process to ensure that those being helped were truly in need. "This appealed to my sense of fairness and good business operations," shared Margaret. "It also made us feel that our donations were treated with respect."...She says that it is a deeply ingrained principle to live simply and be generous in helping others. This is one of the values that my husband and I most admire in the Carls. ("From the executive director," 2008)

At first glance, this passage is remarkable because it reinforces the argument that economic and societal values are, indeed, rivals. Margaret acts in accordance with principle but also benefits from the transaction by feeling respected. Importantly, these perspectives are presented simultaneously. By embedding multiple rationales within one episode, the author implies that "why" someone engages in an act is not a matter of ultimate truth but a matter of interpretation. Upon closer inspection, Margaret's reasoning also revealed something shocking; she is not the only one exposed to interpretation. The casual mention that the program served "only those *truly* in need [emphasis added]" questions the recipient's motives as well.

Taken a step further, one might argue that Margaret was cynical. She suspected that being deceived by a fraudulent claim of need was, indeed, a possibility. Alongside

utilitarian and utopian logics, then, a deep suspicion of motive was equally present. These cynical accounts planted a seed of doubt—the idea that appearances cannot be trusted. As one might expect, skepticism was particularly prominent in political groups that frequently used motive as an opportunity to point out the bifurcation between appearance and reality. For example, Texas Public Research Interest Group (TexPRIG) promoted an alternative reading of advocacy:

If you're trying to understand politics in Washington, just follow the money. Insurers, Wall Street and the Oil companies may be using the language of reform. But in the face of our financial collapse, the health care crisis and energy crunch, what else can they say?

Their lobbying expenditures tell a much different story: They are spending lavishly to protect their interests. In the second quarter of 2009, the health, finance and energy industries dramatically outspent all others on lobbying, doling out more than \$100 million each. ("To our members," 2009, Fall)

Political motives have been subjected to the media's unrelenting gaze since Watergate. After that event, every detail of politicians' private lives has been scrutinized with the aim of unmasking their deepest, innermost secrets (Best & Kellner, 1997; Hart, 1999; Jamieson, 1992; Patterson, 1994). Certainly, nonprofits interacting with government might be "guilty" by association. Like the press, TexPRIG highlighted the contradictions between what high-dollar lobbyists say and what they do, urging readers to "see through" the illusion created by the language of reform to the hidden reality. But when one considers the source—a nonprofit organization—other complications arise.

The rhetoric condemning government and politics constrained TexPRIG's ability to justify its own mission. By scapegoating politics, the group implicated all legislative advocacy, including its own. Put differently, how can TexPRIG convince members to participate when it teaches that the governmental process is merely a spectacle? Burke's analogy of the shepherd illuminates this point: "If the shepherd is guarding his sheep so

that they may be raised for market, though his role (considered in itself as a guarding of the sheep) concerns only their good, he is implicitly identified with their slaughter” (as cited in Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 264). As Hart and Daughton insightfully point out, shepherds only remain innocent if an audience “half-thinks” about their duties (p. 264).

Following the tenets of postmodernism, today’s NPOs seem to relish their role as chief interrogator, warning members to be wary of the way things seem on the surface. And when an organization turned its gaze inward, the results can be disastrous, as when NPOs began debunking their own motives. The belief that membership status or a financial donation expressed cherished values was buried in the messages I studied beneath a thick, anti-axiological pastiche. Manipulation was not hidden; it was front and center, surrounded by mocking, playful, inter-textual images. Instead of selecting an external enemy for members to identify against, many NPOs attempted to create “in-jokes” among members through a process of self-mortification. NTEN Connect spoke this language fluently:

[Your donation] will earn yourself a vote on how Holly Ross, NTEN’s Executive Director, should embarrass herself at the NTC. When we reach \$10,000 she will:

Make her own “Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)” video...But she won’t wear a leotard. (Hey, she has standards!)

Eat a bacon explosion. It’s the pork-phenomena that has swept the Internet. She’ll eat a whole one. (Ed. Note: Please don’t vote to kill our ED)

Or play her college marching band trombone in Union Square. In broad daylight. A bunch of her college buddies have already vowed to turn up to mock her. Should be a good time.

She’s even made a video previewing her potential public loss of dignity...you should check it out. It’s pretty hilarious. (“Help us,” 2009, February)

Does this sound like language from a nonprofit organization, much less a membership organization comprised of individuals dedicated to a career in the NPVS?

What accounts for this oddness? For one thing, the episode is fragmented in the extreme. It is broken into small, random bits that require a working knowledge of pop culture to be comprehensible. The text is filled with asides and parentheticals—rhetorical winks at the reader. But most of all, the passage collapses the trivial (Beyoncé, bacon explosions) with the important (scholarships for needy individuals). In so doing, NTEN betrayed a fundamental assumption of NPOs—that voluntary activity is sincere. Even though the organizations I examined took several different approaches to motive, all achieved the same result. Each of the previous examples produced a bifurcation between appearance and reality.

Preoccupation with authenticity

Calling attention to both the presence of motive and suggesting a separation between the espoused and actual motive, has, ironically, led NPOs to become preoccupied with authenticity. In fact, the pursuit of an authentic image (if there can be such a thing) may be a kind of Holy Grail in the modern world. Potter (2010) explains why:

We live in a world increasingly dominated by the fake, the prepackaged, and artificial. Whichever way we turn we are best by outrageous advertising, lying politicians, and fraudulent memoirists. Some of us live in cookie-cutter suburban developments, others in gentrified urban neighborhoods almost indistinguishable from theme parks. We eat barely nutritious fast food, watch scripted “reality” television shows, and take prepackaged vacations complete with prepackaged memories. Meanwhile, we continuously find refuge on the Internet, where we spend enormous amounts of time hanging out on Facebook messaging our “friends” or wandering around virtual environments like Second Life or World of Warcraft, interacting with avatars of people we’ve never actually met and couldn’t recognize if we did...the demand for the honest, the natural, the real—that is the authentic—has become one of the post powerful movements in contemporary life. (p. 4)

That the nonprofit sector has been swept up in this tumultuous environment is evident in their communication with members.

Nonprofit organizations cloaked their rhetoric in the trappings of “authenticity.” Every group in this study did this at least once through the (re)production of member correspondence. Newsletters commonly displayed notes in ways that heightened the sense of originality by using, for example, such things as hand-written script or if received electronically, in alternate font. They also used languages other than English and presented themselves as part of a chain of messages and responses. The Cuban Numismatic Association (CNA) drew my attention to these tendencies, which is odd since the organization is dedicated to detecting forgeries! Letters from children were also attractive targets for (re)presentation. These pieces can be considered hyper-real, supplying audiences not only with rhetorical “evidence” of youth (such as grammatical errors, lined notebook paper, and cheerful drawings) but also with an emotional sense of “genuineness.” After all, is there any state of being more innocent, more spontaneous, or more authentic than that of a child?

The ubiquitous (re)production of member correspondence reflects an attempt to cope with artificiality. Technology, however, may exacerbate ontological anxiety. The majority of the newsletters I reviewed in this study were retrieved from the Internet and, by its very nature, digital communication raises doubts about what constitutes originality, creativity, and plagiarism (Potter, 2010). We are in the process of evolving from what Lessig (2008) calls a Read Only (RO) culture to a Read/Write (RW) culture. Connection to an “original” author can be lost along the way.

Modern nonprofits also adopted a variant of authenticity, the “real,” as a god term. Importantly, this was a different phenomenon than the concrete use of language I observed in previous chapters. As described below, NPOs literally and constantly

employed the term and its derivations “reality” and “really.” A sampling of the things accorded “real” status were: (1) *clients* as in, “it really is all about the kids” (“What a year,” 2009, Fall-b); (2) *results* producing “real community engagement and change” (“New grant,” 2009, March); and (3) *participation* as a process for uncovering the “real” self (“One-minute,” 2009, November). Yet the suasive power of the term “real” was not complete and all totalizing explanations were rejected. “A visit to Pembroke” that appeared in the Family-to-Family newsletter was fraught with just such contradictions:

Listening to her really gave me an understanding—so much more than I could imagine before—of the wonderful people that live here and try to make a life here—how proud—how thankful they are and how hard their struggles are. It made me feel almost ashamed... Iris was wonderful... Her grandkids were adorable and two of them were even wearing some clothes my daughter had sent months ago... This is the time where the reality of what we do really hit. (“A visit,” October, 2007)

When examined closely, Mary Kay’s story is a double-layered piece. She testifies that experiencing the “reality” of the situation resulted in genuine enlightenment. However, her surprise that Iris’ grandkids actually wear the clothes sent by Mary Kay’s family implies that she considered an alternative possibility. Also evident in her remarks is an awareness that the audience may remain skeptical about the “reality of the situation.” In response to this potential criticism, the story is replete with extraneous detail—Iris’ house had a white picket fence with flowers in the yard (one gets the sense that the author desperately tries to fill in the little details for her audience). “A Visit to Pembroke” is told by and to individuals on the watch for anything that might be packaged and “sold.”

In the main, the NPOs in this study posited a skeptical audience, an audience with only one shared assumption—that they do not want to be “fooled into wasting their time on something they cannot influence” (Eliasoph, 1990, p. 473). Amidst a lacuna of shared

meaning, NPOs sought to close the gap by explicitly offering warrants justifying group endeavors.

Warrants are explicitly offered

Stephen Toulmin's theory of argument suggests that tracing rhetorical warrants allows the critic a method for comparing patterns of reasoning in texts (Hart & Daughton, 2005). His work is based on three key terms: data, claim and warrant. Claims are contested positions that the rhetor wants the audience to accept; as such, they are analogous to the conclusion. Data are evidence the rhetor employs in support of a claim. And warrants "carry" or transfer accepted data to the doubted proposition (Brockriede & Ehninger, 1960). Warrants, as Toulmin (1958) puts it, answer the question "How do you justify the move from these grounds to that claim. What road do you take to get from this starting point to that destination?" (Toulmin, 1958, p. 26). In groups that share assumptions, members dependably contribute to the co-creation of meaning by supplying warrants. In such situations, justification can remain unstated (Hart, 1971). Warrants often lexically emerge as a response to conflicting or absent shared-value premises; thus, they are reliable signals of axiological trouble (Hart, 1971; Wuthnow, 2004).

Nonprofits betrayed uncertainty that Americans continue to cherish the value of group participation. As Joanna, a member of the group Free Press, lamented: "We have lost our sense of group solidarity" ("Activist profile," 2008, Spring). In support of this conclusion, a wide range of groups relied on motivational warrants, or acceptance based on the linkage of personal motivations and desires with group action. Everyone, it seemed, related to the idea of self-interest:

- Charities saw fit to argue the benefit of learning: "So with a mind to helping teach our kids both an understanding of empathy for others and generosity, we thought

having them GIVE to children with ‘less’ on a day when they receive so much would benefit everyone” (“Birthday,” October, 2007).

- Membership organizations reasoned that prosperity trickled down: “By recruiting and retaining primary employers who bring jobs and payroll into the local economy, we are creating new and expanding existing opportunities...various governmental entities benefit through the collection of increased taxes...all prosper in a growing and sustainable economy” (“Q & A,” 2009, April).
- And community groups stressed the desire for improvement: “Be a part of the live united movement. Live united. It’s a credo. A mission. A constant reminder that when we reach out a hand to one, we influence the condition of all. We bolster the health of our communities. And we change lives of those who walk by us every day” (“The live united shirt,” 2009, March).

That many NPOs explicitly linked individual human drives to group solidarity reflect the common complaint of postmodernism—that it replaces “religious [and] teleological faith...informed by strong normative values and utopian visions” with “new emphases on culture, personal identity and everyday life” (Kellner & Best, 1997, p. 271). In short, if these texts are any indication, grand visions of collective action have proved difficult for NPOs to sustain.

Finally, as a way of drawing together the themes presented in this chapter, I argue that an unnamed member of Veterans for Peace said it all best:

Imagine a peace movement that is part of a larger democracy movement. We talk about “outreach” to other groups. We talk about defunding the war to fund human needs. But brothers and sisters, what is our vision? Stopping the F-22 or trading an aircraft carrier for a housing program? It has to be more than that! What we need is to govern ourselves so we can create the kind of life to which we have an indisputable, inalienable right.

But we aren’t going to gain the power needed to govern ourselves if we expend our precious time toiling in an isolated peace movement that merely wants to get our troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan, just as we won’t become self-governing with an environmental movement that aims only for more solar panels and cars with better mileage.

We need to get our minds right so we can see ourselves not as mere workers and consumers but as human beings with an absolute right to define what kind of life we need—and then take it!

We need to create a culture of democracy from the bottom up to replace our culture of death. We need to change our government from what it is today—a huge roadblock guarded round-the-clock by greed and private interests, into a vehicle that nourishes the public interest; that helps us express our love for each other and our planet.

I believe there is a hunger for self-governance and democracy in America and that hunger is the fundamental link between the peace movement and every other movement working to address human needs. (Ferner, 2009, Fall)

This passage tells the entire story of how nonprofit organizations now struggle to create meaning. First, questions regarding organizational and societal motives are raised in the presentation of data and sub-data. Appearances, the corroborating evidence shows, cannot be trusted. The peace movement sells out for a housing program, environmentalism is just glorified consumerism, and government, of course, is corrupted by private interest. Second, the argument develops by a series of bifurcations. The dichotomies of talk/action, worker/consumer, and public/private are successively presented and the entire passage is framed by the contradiction between isolation and community. Finally, there is no economy in these words; this is hard rhetorical work. The rhetor makes no assumptions, articulating no less than three separate warrants for group solidarity. These warrants include the following assertions: incorporation brings power; rights unite all human beings; and every social movement is linked by the hunger to satisfy human needs. In sum, purpose can never be presupposed.

Bob Dylan (1964), an icon of popular music in the 1960's, advised his generation that "It ain't no use to sit and wonder why." But surely wondering why must have some use. Otherwise, what could explain the amount of rhetorical energy NPOs in this study consumed doing just that? The answer to this question, I believe, resides in experience.

In many ways, my analysis has been about the maturation of the NPVS. Survival has forced NPOs to become “experienced” in the ways of the external world. Gaining awareness, however, comes with the loss of naiveté. As Sloterdijk (1984) observes, “the attainment of consciousness is irreversible” (p. 194). NPOs have sacrificed innocence to demonstrate their astuteness, showing that they too understand the rules of the game. To make it today, one must be clever, self-aware, and, above all, possessed of an ironic sensibility.

THE UNSTOPPABLE IRONIC IMPULSE

In contemporary society, irony largely functions to separate insiders—those who share a special knowledge—from the rest of the world. This special knowledge is located in both “having seen the wheels within the wheels” and in the ability to recognize when the ironist is speaking ironically (Booth, 1978; Foss & Littlejohn, 1986). Today, the concept of irony has been hypostatized. “What once was an artificial device available to the rhetor,” concludes Kaufer (1977), “has become a creature of nature...signify[ing] a split perspective between appearance and reality in all its forms.” (p. 92). Irony, in this sense, has gone “cosmic,” invading everything including the nonprofit sector (Glasser, 1994).

The dominance of an ironic posture implies that deception is what the public most fears. This trepidation results in detachment, which some argue is the defining characteristic of the current generation. In describing his peers, Purdy (1998) writes: “We will not be caught out having staked a good part of our all on a false hope—personal, political or both. This is a generation accustomed to seeing its immediate predecessor as a bit naïve, a bit irresponsible...clueless at best, wild-eyed and acid-scarred at worst—all victims of an innocence that our ironists are determined not to

revisit” (p. 85). In retrospect, as a leader of the current generation, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg ought to have suspected that his largesse would be publicly received with wry remarks and the occasional sneer.

Some scholars might counsel that the American public need not be disturbed by this reception, that the ironic impulse may not be all that bad. Irony can, as Burke and others have demonstrated, be empowering. For instance, dialectical irony is capable of performing a corrective function as in the classic examples of a cure being perfected by a disease and a hero completed by the villain (Moore, 1996). Glasser (1994), however, points out that “irony-as-corrective can work...only when there is a stable and clearly articulated moral position to which to appeal, and more generally, a moral vocabulary shared by writer and reader” (p. 12).

CONCLUSION

Has the moral vocabulary of NPOs begun to lose coherence and expressive power in an ironic culture? Again, I refer back to the concept of “boundaries” for insight. Like other social systems, NPOs can be conceived of as either closed or open based on how the organization positions itself in relation to the outside world (Cheney, 1999; Hart, 1984). However, the relationship of NPOs to the external environment is acutely important because these groups, similar to the worker co-ops studied by Cheney (1999), traditionally sought to define themselves as being different from (or superior to) other organizational forms. The NPVS, then, may have been best characterized as a closed rhetorical system possessing an agreed-on doctrine, clearly delineated roles, transcendental values, and a degree of isolation from other rhetorical systems (Hart, 1984). But irony is the opposite of doctrinaire thought and there was ample evidence that

it has penetrated the sector, shifting the balance in favor of “openness” (Hart, 1999). That fewer “true believers” now populate American nonprofits is a distinct possibility.

If that is the case, what might result from these changes? While it is premature to render all of the assumptions and values of the modern era obsolete, there is reason to be worried that the nonprofit sector is becoming increasingly frail. It may sound old-fashioned, but foundationalism sustains much social good. As essential, universal truths fade away, they are not necessarily being replaced by a set of infinite possibilities (Deetz, 2001). Rather, as I have presented, universal assumptions of goodwill and organizational stability once enjoyed by the NPVS have been replaced with expressions of fragmented identity, questions about sincerity of purpose, pressure to mask their own hierarchical reality, and needs to justify their mission and purpose. Without these previously structuring principles, where does this leave the NPVS?

Weber (1946), in particular, suggests that legitimacy is predicated upon the existence of such structuring principles. Unless people continue to have axiological faith—in charity, in helping out—the wider social myths of the past, including those on which the NPO is based, will no longer have legitimizing force (Waerass, 2009). When these concerns about mission are combined with the other uncertainties now faced by the modern NPO—identity, trust, and hierarchy—the whole issue of organizational legitimacy comes to the fore. The following chapter will reflect on this combination of challenges and how they might best be faced by contemporary nonprofit organizations.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Implications

“Our public messages are the measure of us all.”

--Roderick Hart

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the course of this study, I have argued that something has changed in the nonprofit and voluntary sector. The American people seem to have sensed a change as well. Perhaps they noticed the difference when listening to political leaders talk about nonprofits. For example, in 1917, Rhode Island Senator Peter Gerry made these remarks:

The charitable and religious institutions of our country are very great institutions for good. Our hospitals and our different organizations for relieving the poor are doing work that the Government would have to do if they did not, and I believe they are doing it a great deal better than it could be done by the Government. I do not think for one moment that any sensible man will dispute the statement that where persons are working purely from religious and philanthropic motives of the highest kind—for example like the Sisters of Charity—they will perform the work with greater ability...I think that they ought to be encouraged...and I believe that the people of this country are in favor of such action. (as cited in Jacobs & Sobieraj, 2007)

Almost one hundred years later, Florida Representative Michael Bilirakis made a very different observation:

Since the devastating events of September 11th, Americans young and old have opened their hearts and their pocketbooks to help the victims of this terrible tragedy. To date, over \$1 billion has been raised for relief efforts, proving once again that Americans are the most compassionate and generous people in the world...I am alarmed at reports which suggest that charitable organizations are not acting in good faith to use the contributions of generous Americans to deliver timely assistance to the victims of September 11th and their families. How do we explain to elementary school children that their hard-raised contributions may *not* actually be used to help the families in need? (*"Charitable"*, 2001)

The first passage encapsulates the ideological privilege and societal values traditionally represented by nonprofit organizations. In this example, NPOs are linked to

what is best about Americans. When commenting on the modern NPVS, however, the second speaker associates the American people with altruism and compassion but, he demonstrates, NPOs no longer benefit from these same presumptions. Indeed, the Honorable Michael Bilirakis questions the fundamental legitimacy of these groups; the tone of his remarks represents a sizable shift from a century before. Could it be possible that the best days of nonprofits are behind them or can Americans' faith in these groups be renewed? In this chapter, I offer a glimpse into the future of the nonprofit and voluntary sector. Before doing so, it is necessary to review the arguments forwarded thus far.

THE RHETORIC OF NPOS

In this study, I have considered the following questions: What values are expressed and sustained in the modern nonprofit and voluntary sector? How do the complex financial, institutional, and cultural forces impinging upon contemporary nonprofits reshape the presentation of values? And, finally, if these groups do indeed reflect the values of American citizens, what interpretive conclusions might be drawn about society writ-large? In searching for the answers to these questions, I identified three external forces that have interpenetrated the nonprofit and voluntary sector and that have placed enormous pressure on NPOs.

In particular, large-scale financial, institutional, and cultural challenges now confront the contemporary NPVS. In the time between Senator Gerry's remarks and those of Representative Bilirakis, nonprofits reduced their dependence on donations from private individuals and began to receive a majority of their funding from alternate sources such as government contracts, grants from large foundations, and revenue-generating fee-for-service programs. With each succeeding generation, the volunteers that, as Senator

Gerry put it, “worked from purely religious and philanthropic motives,” have been transformed into a professionalized workforce with specialized skills and training in management. And, on the whole, the public belief in “great institutions” has been reduced sharply. Today, nonprofits inhabit a cultural universe increasingly marked by fragmentation and, sometimes, alienation. In combination, these forces pushed NPOs into a more competitive social system.

How might nonprofit organizations cope with these new challenges? In a review of the NPVS literature, I identified two suggestions commonly advocated by researchers and practitioners: (1) That NPOs remain true to the traditional, *societal value orientation*, or that (2) NPOs adopt a more *market-oriented* approach. I detailed the values and related assumptions of these competing orientations and then applied this conceptual model to the texts of twenty-one diverse nonprofit organizations. To reveal how NPOs implicitly discussed matters of value, I chose to analyze their newsletters. Such ordinary texts presented me with an opportunity to study “quietly affirming moments of discourse” (Hart, 1984, p. 749).

My overall finding is that nonprofit organizations have lost their presumptive ideological privilege as a result of the constant strain between societal and market values. In defending this thesis, I described the competing rhetorics of societal values and market values, explained the effects of the struggle between these combatants on contemporary NPOs, and demonstrated that this battle left rhetorical scars now evident in how nonprofits discuss four common organizational concerns—identity, trust, hierarchy, and mission. The results of my analysis, presented in propositional form, are as follows:

1). NPOs have fragmented identities.

The constant battle between maintaining an altruistic image and the need to portray themselves as competent economic actors produced four features in the NPO

discourse: (1) they adopted the language of business; (2) they reimagined the public as a consumer; (3) they touted the establishment of strategic partnerships; and (4) they constructed events to heighten the appearance of productivity. One thing became apparent: altruism and consumerism have become rhetorical rivals in defining the character of today's NPOs and, as a result, NPOs have developed fragmented identities.

2). *NPOs must emphasize outputs.*

The nonprofit label alone no longer signifies inherent integrity and so trust has become an ongoing issue that NPOs must continually address. Adjusting to new expectations of transparency and accountability have led to conspicuous efforts by NPOs to (1) quantify and construct social problems as “solvable;” (2) account for success with tangibles; (3) view growth, expansion, and replication as unquestioned goods; and (4) seek independent third parties to certify their performance. The emphasis placed on measurement has left the public and scholars alike with an incomplete portrait of the NPVS.

3). *NPOs are bedeviled by their complexity.*

NPOs now mask power relations. They do so by: (1) adopting a feminine “tone at the top;” (2) obscuring authorship; and (3) focusing on individuals, not organizations. Although issues of power and hierarchy are still present, they are now manifested in unlikely places via the employment of an organizational rather than a societal “we.” Paradoxically, NPOs reified hierarchy even while raising expectations that hierarchy no longer exists. They did so in part because Americans still cling to a romantic ideal of nonprofit behavior. These mixed messages signaled that growing organizational complexity increasingly challenges NPOs.

4). *NPOs have fewer true believers.*

The postmodern (or hyper-modern) milieu of the late 20th and early 21st century has left distinctive rhetorical scars on how NPOs have articulated their missions. Specifically, these groups (1) posited a postmodern audience by constantly and overtly discussing motive; (2) reified the “real;” (3) provided explicit warrants for group participation. As a result, the NPO’s pristine purpose can no longer be presupposed. Such rhetorical behavior demonstrates the irresistibility of the ironic impulse and suggests that there are fewer “true believers” in today’s NPOs.

By examining the treatment of identity, trust, hierarchy, and mission, I have shown that while the tension between societal and market values may be experienced as several distinct battles, they “weave a single reality” (Edelman, 1988). Taken together, the NPOs in this study favored rational, pragmatic values over idealistic, societal instincts in their discourse. Although such references were often implicit, the NPOs nevertheless sent a consistent, persuasive message that they were thoroughly “modern” organizations. Before considering the overall effect of this discourse let us examine the implications of these findings for nonprofit and voluntary sector theory, for organizational legitimacy, and for collective memory.

NONPROFIT AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR THEORY

Identifying the unifying features of such a large, incredibly diverse, group of organizations has presented considerable difficulty in nonprofit and voluntary sector theory. The terminological confusion even leads some scholars to go so far as to express skepticism over whether the sector represents an institutional field (Frumkin, 2005). The concept remains under construction by multiple, ongoing theoretical conversations in the field of economics, sociology, political science, and social work. Each discipline has made persuasive and important contributions to what we currently “know” about NPOs.

Sociologists, for example, attempt to define nonprofits by classification, “typing out” organizations based on what they “do” (Brown, et al., 2000, p. 118). This line of research has produced, for instance, the complex, 26-category National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) in an attempt to distinguish among the mass of associations in the United States. Economists, in contrast, posit that “contract failure,” or the lack of economic incentive, is the key to explaining nonprofit formation and behavior. Political scientists theorize that most goods are targeted at a “stylized median voter” and that NPOs exist to provide services to those who are at the margins. Disciplines that study NPOs as a profession find that the nonprofit organizational form is well-suited to the realization of worker goals such as autonomy (Minkoff & Powell, 2006).

Communication research is a relatively recent arrival on the nonprofit research scene but has much to add to the conversation (Lewis, 2005). Wuthnow (2004) makes the case thusly:

Besides trust, the culture of civil society is also composed of messages about caregiving itself, about giving and receiving of gifts, about compassion, and about love. These messages and the values on which they are based are often assumed...but are seldom examined. (p. 9)

I believe that a rhetorical perspective sheds light on aspects of NPOs that previously have gone under-examined. For instance, while each of the above disciplines provides insight into the *functions* of NPOs, communication researchers are uniquely qualified to address the unanswered, macroscopic question of what “nonprofitness” *means*. Put differently, the idea that the nonprofit and voluntary sector has not yet been adequately defined indicates that it is being socially contested and, thus, is at least in part a rhetorical concept.

Conceptualizing the nonprofit and voluntary sector as a rhetorical construct supplements gaps in existing knowledge by providing an alternate definitional

framework. Instead of only being subjected to functional categorizations, NPOs might also be connected by communicative patterns transcending function. For instance, are there rhetorical similarities between human service groups and a youth soccer league? Can persuasive appeals be employed sector-wide or are some arguments off-limits to NPOs? The pursuit of such questions potentially yields a definition of nonprofit organizations as a rhetorical genre. For the time being, I stop just short of that claim. My work does demonstrate, however, that NPOs embrace a fundamental dialectic between societal and market values. All NPOs face this rhetorical challenge and, as a result of this ubiquitous demand, paradoxical messages now permeate the texts I have examined here. Based on this evidence, I speculate that contradiction is now a central, definitional aspect of the entire nonprofit and voluntary sector.

To define an organization, or a system of organizations, by contradiction borrows from the early work of Anthony Giddens (1984). Generally speaking, system contradictions are “fault lines or characteristics of the structure that oppose or work against each other” (Meyers & Garrett, 1993, p. 152). Researchers such as Poole, Siebold, and McPhee (1985), Myers and Garrett (1993), and Kenough and Lake (1993) adapt Giddens’ theory for communication studies. In so doing, these scholars contend that opposing and incompatible value structures can be interpreted as system contradictions.

A number of value contradictions were readily apparent in how these groups framed issues of identity, trust, hierarchy, and mission. The conflicting messages NPOs sent about organizational power are prominent examples. On one hand, NPOs projected the appearance of democracy by adopting a feminine tone at the top. Yet, on the other hand, these same groups manifested hierarchy by mediating members’ experiences and using the collective token “we” in reference to organizational as opposed to social

realities. In addition, a paradoxical tension exists between the stated missions of many of these groups and how they regard their members. While organizations such as the United Way are dependent upon altruism to accomplish their goals, their rhetoric also implies that volunteers or donors expect something in return for their contributions of time and/or money (“Doing good means knowing where to shop”). The contradiction here is clear: NPOs necessarily depend on non-rational voluntary acts of kindness to exist but they talk as if all individuals were rational actors.

Nonprofit organizations are, then, currently defined by a constellation of rhetorical instabilities. Dialectics of masculinity versus femininity, tangible versus intangible, mystical versus empirical, and local versus cosmopolitan (to name only a few), permeated the discourse I examined. All of the competing matrices above can be read as outward displays of the underlying contradiction between societal and market values found in modern NPOs.

Defining the nonprofit and voluntary sector as a rhetorical constellation of instability also suggests that we revisit the liminality of nonprofit organizations. Thomas Kuhn (1970) describes paradigms as “a constellation of values, beliefs, and methodological assumptions, whether tacit or explicit, inscribed in a world view” (p. 12). Of course, Kuhn wrote about scientific paradigms, but Kellner and Best (1997) brilliantly appropriate the metaphor to describe postmodernism as a cultural turn:

Signify[ing] both specific shifts within virtually every contemporary theoretical discipline and artistic field *and* the coalescing of these changes into a larger worldview...not only in the history of ideas, as Kuhn and others have done, but also as effects of developing social and institutional factors...both as internal responses within a given conceptual domain and...as broader mutations in society. (p. xii)

Nonprofit organizations may very well be in the midst of such a shift. However, because tension is still present in the system, the alteration is not yet complete. NPOs have

previously been understood in terms of their “in between” status, yet such references almost always locate the suspension points as states versus markets. A much more fundamental way of looking at their liminality would be to view the nonprofit and voluntary sector as a space existing between the old (traditional) and the new (modernism).

ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY

By viewing the nonprofit and voluntary sector as lying between the old and the new, my research also highlights the basis on which the public evaluates the legitimacy of nonprofits. In late modernity, legitimacy is a common concern (some might say it is a preoccupation). Niklas Luhmann (1995) theorized that this development was a result of the movement from a stratified society to functional society. As a part of this transition, he believed, organizations could no longer be justified by natural norms or institutional roles. Similarly, Lyotard (1984) posits that the replacement of traditional knowledge with scientific knowledge has left Western culture “governed by the demand for legitimation” (p. 27). Consequently, the perception that an organization is “worthy” of voluntary compliance must be continually renewed and reinforced (Waerass, 2009). Given these constraints, what can my study tell us about legitimacy in today’s NPVS?

To begin, values are ultimately legitimating discourses. Individuals, collectives, and institutions employ values to justify their right to exist. Talcott Parsons (1964) explained the primary link between values and legitimation thusly: “Legitimation in this sense is the appraisal of action in terms of shared or common values in the social system” (p. 175). Parsons concluded his explanation by saying that: “The term legitimation...may refer to the main link between values and their ‘spelling out’ in the context of the institutional level of the regulation of action. An institutional pattern, that is, legitimized

in terms of the underlying values of the social system” (p. 197). Jurgen Habermas (1984) is also among the many theorists who connect values with legitimacy. He holds that the public determines legitimacy in accordance with mutually accepted values (Burkhart, 2009).

Prior research on legitimacy in the nonprofit and voluntary sector draws heavily upon institutional theory. From this perspective, legitimacy is a product of how well an organization adapts to its external environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In other words, the best adaptors are considered the most legitimate. A slightly different possibility is offered by Dart’s (2004) appraisal of social enterprise. His analysis is based on Suchman’s (1995) typology of pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy. Pragmatic legitimacy, according to Suchman, is a calculation of exchange: Do we get anything out of this? Moral legitimacy is normative, based on propriety: Does this fit with the broader sociopolitical environment? The final category of legitimacy is cognitive, referring to preconscious, taken-for-granted assumptions: Does this feel right? Dart argues that social enterprise in the NPVS fits the definition of moral legitimacy because it conforms to:

the emergence of a renewed and pervasive faith in market and business-based approaches and solutions...If business models and business language have become dominate and are the sociocultural environment’s preferred modes of problem solving and preferred structures of organizing, then it follows that even social-sector organizations can be accorded legitimacy by adopting the language, goals, and structures of this ideologically ascendant form. (p. 418-419)

I certainly agree with Dart about the emerging dominance of market ideology; support for this point has been a major focus of my study. However, conflating “moral” legitimacy with public opinion, as opposed to ethical or deontological principle, may be problematic. My research, like that of Powell (1991) and Cheney (1991, 1995), illustrates a paradox of legitimacy—in some cases, successful adaptation to the external environment can result

in *reduced* legitimacy in the public's eye. This contradiction is more likely to occur in organizations based on traditional legitimacy.

To unpack this paradox, I return to Max Weber's (1947) seminal definition of organizational legitimacy. In The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, Weber identifies three sources of authority that legitimate organized systems: charismatic, legal-rational, and traditional. A system's legitimacy varies "according to the kinds of beliefs that support it" (Weirass, 2009, p. 304). Legal-rational authority is legitimated by rules and rights, while charismatic legitimacy resides in devotion to an exceptional individual. Traditional authority is legitimized by "having been 'enacted' or 'imposed'...treated as having always existed and been binding" (Parsons, 1947, p. 60).

Tompkins (1987) insightfully illustrates how Weber's definition of legitimacy is rooted in communication. He posits that Weber's principles are analogous to Aristotle's three forms of proof—ethos, pathos, and logos. Personal credibility, ethos, is associated with a particular speaker, as is charismatic authority. Aristotle described pathos as the "power of stirring emotions" and, according to Tompkins, this bears a strong similarity to Weber's traditional authority "especially considering when one concedes that commitments to the old ways and routines are more dependent on emotions or a quasi-religious frame of mind than on reason or argument" (p. 80). The third type of proof Aristotle offered, logos, corresponds to Weber's legal-rational authority.

When viewed from the perspective of Weber and Tompkins, what I have referred to here as the "ideological privilege" of the nonprofit and voluntary sector can also be interpreted as traditional authority. The claim that the NPVS was historically legitimized on authoritative grounds finds ample support in the writings of Robert Putnam (2000), Harry Boyte (1989), and other neo-Tocquevillians who hold that voluntary association is part of an American intellectual and moral "*inheritance*" (S. R. Smith, 2004). As Eberly

(1998) succinctly puts it “Civility and civil society are ultimately moral concepts. To succeed, the civil society movement must bring about the recovery and modern application of the nation’s highest moral ideals” (p. 14).

The *reverential attitude* with which these organizations have been treated is another indicator of their dependence on traditional authority. The American public’s unquestioned esteem for the NPVS has been variously referred to as the “myth” of the NPVS (Carson, 2002), its “special claim on American affection” (Wuthnow, 1991b), and, in perhaps the fullest expression of such deference, as “part of a national folklore...a potent ideology of ‘voluntarism’ invest[ed] with mythic status as the best and truest expression of the American character” (Salamon, 1997, p. 288). This, in sum, is the stuff of traditional authority; nonprofit privilege has continually stemmed from it in the past.

For traditional authority to remain legitimate, however, the public must continue to believe in its “generally superior status” (Wearass, 2009; Parsons, 1947, p. 188). Traditional meanings, that is, are authoritative because the grounds for their legitimacy cannot be questioned (Hanson, 1985). If nonprofit organizations still lay claim to traditional legitimacy, we might expect them to exhibit the traits that Hart (1977, 1984) identifies with closed rhetorical systems, including absolutist strategies, telegraphic message qualities, and isolationist appeals. But, as we have seen, the NPOs in this study did not possess these rhetorical qualities. In particular, these groups found it necessary to explain their motives, issue explicit warrants for their claims, and constantly provide “proof” of their authenticity.

The nonprofit organizations examined here were plagued by the “neurosis of modernism,” constructing legitimacy in a manner more rhetorically consistent with Weber’s legal-rationality (Tompkins, 1987, p. 93). The rhetoric of legal-rational authority, according to Cheney (1995, 2008), surfaces as a broad discourse that privileges

standardization and responsiveness to market demands. From the modernist mindset, then, “neither religious or moral values, but the duly established priorities of effectiveness, become the primary sources of legitimacy” (Fenn, 1972, p. 28). Repeatedly, I observed NPOs reflecting this dictate. Groups went to great lengths to quantify social problems and their solutions, and NPOs found ingenious ways to reframe intangibles into measureable outputs.

A market-oriented discourse may, therefore, be reflective of society in general but that does not necessarily mean that nonprofits who encourage this frame will be perceived as *more* legitimate. In fact, it is possible that this type of legitimacy actually represents a turning away from the taken-for-granted status that nonprofit organizations previously enjoyed. What might explain this paradox of legitimacy in NPOs? Luhmann offers a clue that directs our attention back to the difference between open and closed systems. Suzanne Holmstrom (2009) summarizes his observations thusly:

Organizations are closed in order to be open, open in order to be closed. If the open observation is not founded in a specific social filter, which is established by the means of the closed boundary, then there is nothing to guide the observation; the organization drowns...it cannot separate itself from the environment. (p. 190-191)

Change in response to the surrounding environment, then, threatens the “true” or lasting “essence” of an organization. For traditional organizations that have derived their power from a sense of permanence, this danger is particularly acute (Cheney, 1991). For these groups, adaptation becomes a precarious balancing act, “engaging but not becoming completely absorbed in the larger society” (Cheney, 1995, p. 173). In other words, by adapting to current social norms, NPOs may have accelerated their loss of unquestioned legitimacy.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The selection of which values nonprofits promote as justification of their *raison d'être* leads one to consider how future Americans might “remember” the nonprofit and voluntary sector and, by extension, themselves. To say that the traditional legitimacy of nonprofits has eroded is to say that Americans’ memories of these organizations have been altered as well. The staying-power of tradition, its transmission over time and space, is a function of “retaining and caring for the object of remembrance” (Browne, 1995; Phillips, 2010, p. 217). Thus, it is often argued that the cultural fabrication of collective memory resides in tradition (Browne, 1995).

How does a society interpret, or remember, its past? Here it is helpful to restate Wittgenstein’s claim that memory is rhetorical. Billig (2010) encapsulates the process:

Remembering is not tied to the recall of directly experienced stimuli for we can, and continually do, claim to remember events at which we were not personally present. Thus a present generation can “remember” a previous generation’s sacrifice. Such memories can be passed across time, rather as the mothers, talking about family photographs with their children, were transmitting the family memories across time...memory is “collective” rather than individual. (p. 213)

Language not only instructs us about a particular story, it constructs the types of things that ought to be remembered. An individual is not entirely in possession of a memory; instead, it exists in a social context (Edwards & Middleton, 1986). As a result, collective memory is “a discursive group activity of interpreting the past” (Hartelius, 2011, p. 73).

Benedict Anderson’s (2003) work Imagined Communities demonstrates the process of collective memory. Anderson reveals that in order to create the “idea” of nationalism, citizens were first required to forget things that were once considered to be of value (p. 200-201). For instance, the American “Civil War” came to be seen as a fraternal battle between brothers and not the clash of separate, sovereign nations. Other studies have documented shifts in the public remembrance of Abraham Lincoln (Morris,

2004), September 11th (Balthrop, Blair, & Michel, 2010; Schulz & Reyes, 2008), and historic sites such as Hull House (Dubrow, 1992). In sum, memory is not fixed; it is an expressive activity that must be learned and then performed proficiently.

Based on this review and the evidence in my study, we can make several provisional claims about the American public memory and nonprofit organizations. First and foremost, how we talk about the nonprofit sector matters. In texts such as newsletters, NPOs enact their values and these discursive performances help frame the public memory of the NPVS. Next, maintaining the association of a particular value with the nonprofit and voluntary sector requires that this value be presented in the context of NPO activity. In other words, because memory is a selective process of remembering and forgetting, preserving the tradition of societal values in the NPVS means that nonprofits must actively and repeatedly depict these principles at work in their organizations. By doing so, can NPOs condition the remembrance of past soci-democratic values in a way that is useful in the present. At times, however, some nonprofits have neglected this charge. Recall that in chapter six, members could not be counted on to fill-in-the-blanks supporting argumentative premises and that many NPOs explicitly warranted group solidarity by linking it to materialistic, human drives. Such documented lack of enthymematic reasoning can be understood as a failure of remembrance (Phillips, 2010).

Why be concerned over whether or not the American public remembers NPOs differently? Because values preserved in public memory keep latent assumptions alive (Edelman, 1988). If values are not carefully tended in nonprofit messages then there is real danger is that these symbols will be unavailable when the American public needs them most. When LBJ launched the New Deal, for example, he called upon the ideal of altruistic voluntarism that “remained firmly lodged in the pantheon of American

symbols” (Salamon, 1997, p. 288). But, in the aftermath of 9/11 when George W. Bush attempted to reassure the American public, he could no longer depend on such strong associations. Instead, the President said: “I urge people to go to their businesses on Monday. I understand major league baseball is going to start playing again. It is important for America to get on about its life” (as cited in Schulz & Reyes, 2008, p. 636). Citizens now are asked to perform their solidarity as consumers.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR TODAY’S NPOs

At this point, it should be clear that modern nonprofit organizations operate in a more “open” rhetorical system. The situation facing these groups is complex, as are the societal problems addressed by many NPOs. To say that I believe in nonprofits is an understatement. My identity has been shaped by these organizations: my paternal grandfather was active in the Order of Knights of Pythias; each of my immediate family members was (believe it or not) part of a bowling league; and I spent my childhood playing soccer at the local Optimist’s club and my adult life doing outreach for a not-for-profit research institute. All of this has made it hard to look dispassionately at NPOs. Yet I have done so because of an abiding faith in rhetoric as a vehicle for change. In this spirit, I offer five communication strategies to assist nonprofit organizations in the future, strategies that, while practical, also get at deeper forces that threaten the modern nonprofit organization.

1). Eliminate business jargon.

The continued use of market language to describe NPO activities does a disservice to the nonprofit and voluntary sector. I have repeatedly argued that, at least in part, reality is constructed through communication. Indiscriminate inter-mixing of business terminology can have unintended consequences for NPOs. Rather than being a

strategic advantage, the use of business-like language subjects NPOs to the “principle of optimal performance” which is based on maximizing output and minimizing input (Lyotard, 1984, p. 44). The performance expectations aroused by business jargon places nonprofits on the uneven playing field of materialism, a space to which NPOs are not intellectually or emotionally suited.

The co-mingling also constrains a nonprofit’s rhetorical defenses, their natural immunity, against the onslaught of modernism. When for-profits co-opt the idealist symbols of not-for-profits, the overall result is a cheapening of symbolic value (Merleman, 1966). Linguistic mash-ups like “social entrepreneur,” “corporate virtue,” and “boycott” are worthy of note in this regard. As the words “social,” “virtue,” and “boycott,” are absorbed and naturalized by the market, they lose their power to stimulate the imagination about how things could be different (Eikenberry, 2009). Of course, it is unrealistic to ask nonprofits to become rhetorical police. A simpler move in this direction would be for NPOs to carefully consider associations or partnerships from a symbolic, not a financial, perspective. By using this optic, NPOs may find that the long-term detriment to their “symbolic coinage” far outweighs the monetary gain they may realize in the short-term.

A gentle reminder of the cumulative impact of borrowing “buzz words” from for-profit business is also warranted. To talk about “return on investment,” or “number of clients served,” is to reify the status quo by reproducing a world-view in which resources are scarce and competition is natural. Such a construction is an assumption rather than an empirical reality and other ways of thinking are also possible (Aggar, 1989). For instance, alternatives to labels such as “client” or “customer” are available and should be considered by NPOs. “Constituent” lacks sex appeal but is a more fitting “service” metaphor because it highlights the public’s rights as opposed to its ability to pay.

Refusing the discourse of market values, leaving the game so-to-speak, is one way to step outside the system and allow for the potential of a generative, transformative dialogue (Eikenberry, 2009).

2). *Find principle in the practical.*

Another closely related possibility is for NPOs to elevate the level of argument in their messages. Nonprofits would be well-served by a communication strategy that, as Hart (1984) puts it, transforms the empirical into the philosophical. In practice, idealistic appeals argue from definition (Bostdorff & Goldzwig, 1994). For example, a nonprofit might define all individuals as equal under the law and/or in the eyes of God and, in accordance with this principle, suggest their members *ought* to partake in co-operative efforts aiding the less fortunate. Such an argument is not provable in the classic scientific sense but is anchored by both moral rules and ethical principles (Burkhart, 2009). Elevating strategies may seem like an obvious approach. The NPOs I observed, however, did just the opposite. Most groups took a reductionist path, arguing from cause-and-effect or from consequence. In so doing, the nonprofits actually suppressed the level of discourse by keeping it on a pragmatic rather than a moral level.

Shifting the level of argument from the pragmatic to the principled advantages NPOs because idealistic arguments “fit” with the traditional, utopian spirit of NPVS values. The ability to present democratic dialogue is another benefit to NPOs employing this strategy. Idealistic arguments broaden the scope of debate and, thus, enlarge its relevant audience. To illustrate this point, let us explore a brief example: a nonprofit group considering expansion. An argument from principle might proceed along the following lines: “God’s will mandates that everyone be served.” Whether or not the NPOs should expand is everyone’s business because technical, elite expertise is not needed to reason about debates that are framed as right/wrong or good/evil. Conversely,

a pragmatic approach restricts the discussion, limiting it to those who possess specific knowledge of relevant issues such as zoning rules, the interpretation of economic data, and the like. A distinctive mix of idealistic and pragmatic appeals characterizes much of American persuasive discourse and some scholars go so far as to assert that rhetors typically fail if they stress one theme too overtly (Arnold, 1977; Bostdorff & Goldzwig, 1994). Contemporary nonprofits may be an exception to this rule.

3). *Everyone gets to speak.*

This proposition naturally follows from the communication behaviors described above. The next-step NPOs can take is to extend their focus beyond *what* is said to examine *who* is doing the talking. Nonprofits should review their communication with an eye toward ensuring that all voices are equally represented. This process requires NPOs to consider conspicuous silences as well. Specifically, I direct their attention to recipients' voices in NPO discourse. Failure to correct what I found to be a problematic omission dramatically undercuts any "democratic" message the nonprofit may hope to convey. If all group members (staff, board, volunteers, recipients, etc.) are not given the opportunity to speak, even the most progressive and idealistic organizations become prey to accusations of hypocrisy, patriarchy, and of "speaking on behalf of" members.

It sounds like a simple plan—certify that staff, volunteers, members and recipients are given equal voice in the group's newsletter, on their website, or at the annual fundraising banquet—but this is no easy task. In applying this strategy, NPOs are likely to encounter multiple difficulties: recipients may be hard to locate and reluctant to share their stories; professional staff may be unwilling to tolerate "unprofessionalism" (peculiarities in grammar, for example); and giving everyone the right to speak invites critique and disagreement. Certainly, such a proposal runs contrary to what an organization usually desires since even voluntary groups typically reserve debate for

“backstage,” off-the-record moments (Eliasoph, 1998). The front-stage, public demonstration of dialogue, disagreement, and debate, however, should be given priority. Ironically, by drawing public attention to what is now perceived as weakness, NPOs could transform it into a source of strength. If nonprofit groups celebrate dissent in textual representation, they might provide a rare example of productive difference, a democratic ideal indeed (Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004).

A final, and certainly more radical, recommendation regarding the treatment of “voice” in the NPVS calls for resistance to the well-meaning, but constraining, label “mediating institutions.” Berger and Neuhaus coined this term in the 1970’s and since that time it has been widely-adopted. Yet the notion of mediation raises a symbolic contradiction in the NPVS. To “mediate” implies passivity, promoting the idea that NPOs ought to speak “on behalf of” members instead of letting these individuals speak for themselves. “Mediation” may have neutralized/naturalized the common rhetorical practice of NPOs to re-tell, and even re-interpret, members’ experiences. Alternatively, I urge nonprofits to reassert their historic foundations by explicitly reclaiming the title of democratic institutions.

4). Tell radically old-fashioned stories.

Active engagement in what Gabriel (2004) calls “story-work” might also revitalize the roots of the NPVS. That the nonprofit and voluntary sector once stood for the “best of the American character,” suggests rich narrative possibilities. Given their “storied” past, NPOs are a fertile breeding ground for integrative narratives and these groups have the potential to create a powerful counter-discourse challenging the dominance of “local” narratives. Thus, this proposition recommends that NPOs provide “irrational” symbolic constructions that link events and individuals to deeper meanings

that transcend rationality (Gabriel, 2004). Adoption of this approach is simultaneously a radical and old-fashioned idea.

Edwick and Silbey's (1995) distinction between hegemonic and subversive narratives helps to explain my paradoxical proposition. Hegemonic narratives function by appealing to implicit understandings of the world while, in contrast, subversive stories make the connection between the particular and the general explicit (Mumby, 2004). According to these authors, "Subversive stories are narratives that employ the connection between the particular and the general by *locating the individual within societal organization* [emphasis added]" (Edwick & Silbey, 1995, p. 220). By creating "grand" narratives reaffirming traditional, societal values, NPOs can harken back to a mystical past and also subvert the hyper-rational status quo of modernity. In essence, I am advocating that NPOs tell subversive stories. Doing so would help us re-imagine the story-type of the "concerned individual" identified in chapter 6, thereby drawing attention to *both* situated and trans-situational meanings.

5). *Repetition, repetition, repetition.*

My final suggestion to NPOs is neither new nor radical. I merely restate Aristotle's ancient recommendation of "disciplined repetition." Gergen et al. (2004), poetically capture the essential importance of communicative ritual:

A key to the success of the dance is a history of practice. Yet this is not the practice of isolated individuals, but of the collaborative unit. Their practice together readies each of them for the movements of the other. The slight pressure of the male's hand may send his partner into a swirl...And so it is in the case of generative dialogue...there must be repetitive scenarios of relationship, sequences of action that form a reliable core. (p. 49)

Practice and repetition are the easiest, yet most effective method for NPOs to enact the all of the communication strategies described above. This is an especially important strategy in an era of New Media, an era in which a nonprofit can experiment with Twitter,

YouTube, Facebook, etc. to reinforce—and reanimate—its traditional thematics. By varying the modality used to carry its message, the NPO may therefore be able to repeat its core beliefs without seeming repetitive.

All in all, the five suggestions above are practical ways to produce a generative dialogue in the nonprofit and voluntary sector but they are certainly not the last word on the subject. In particular, I hope that future research will elaborate on two issues raised here: the prospects for legitimacy and the exploration the “Other” in the discourse of the nonprofit and voluntary sector.

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

First, an intriguing set of studies extending Weber’s categories of legitimate authority may provide a useful starting point for further development of the concept in the NPVS. Satow (1975) and Rothschild-Whitt (1979) have both suggested that Weber intended, but never completed, the description of a *values-rational* form of authority based on transcendent appeals. Concern over the crisis of legitimacy in the nonprofit sector will likely increase. Completion of this project might provide NPOs with additional resources to resolve the paradox of legitimacy illustrated by my research. Waerass (2009) puts forth another possibility—organizations can establish legitimacy grounded in Weber’s concept of charisma. Most NPOs can be traced back to charismatic leadership (Jeavons, 1992; Mason, 1996), but suggestions for *institutionalizing charisma* after the original leader departs are rare. Waerass (2009) begins a discussion of both the theoretical and practical possibility that effective public relations campaigns can endow organizations themselves with attractive “personality” characteristics.

A second series of questions stems from reflection on my own research biases. In conceptualizing the modern nonprofit and voluntary sector as a battle between utopian,

societal values and pragmatic, market values, I have chosen a particularly Western way of looking at the system. Such a frame may be appropriate or it may not be. Future scholarship is needed to interrogate this assumption. Additionally, my research uncovered glaring discrepancies between the expressed and implied discourse of power in the NPOs. This observation generates a number of avenues for future research including: What do the silences of an NPO tell us about its construction of the “other”? Or, in a more critical vein, one might interrogate, and then articulate, the absence of recipients’ voices from the discourse of the nonprofit and voluntary sector.

CONCLUSION

What might the future hold for the nonprofits themselves? If the organizations studied here are any indication, it is safe to conclude that the nonprofit and voluntary sector is no longer a special, set-apart place (Hart, 1999, p. 92). Like the American people in general, these groups have adjusted to the winds of change by becoming more modern. Doing so can be comforting but there is also reason to be concerned that the societal values of the nonprofit and voluntary sector may be gradually displaced, a fear beautifully expressed by Hannah Arendt (1963):

Without remembrance, without tradition which selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what there worth is—there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future, only sempiternal change of the world and the biological cycle of creatures in it. (p. 43)

I am yet unwilling to declare that the halcyon days of the nonprofit sector are past, never to come again. Why? Because over the course of this research, as I routinely noted the reversals, the ironies, the contradictions, and the paradoxes in nonprofit discourse, an insight came upon me—that I was bearing witness to endless possibilities as well. It is fitting, then, that I find optimism in the words of the great pessimist, Jean-Francois

Lyotard (1984). He writes that “we should be happy that the tendency toward the temporary contract is ambiguous: it is not totally subordinated to the goal of the system” (p. 66).

In closing, I am *happy* to renew the call for NPOs to revitalize their societal values and to recognize the value-laden nature of business practices adopted in the name of “efficiency.” In doing so, I add my name to a lengthy list of individuals that senses a change in contemporary Americans’ symbols of interconnectedness and, hence, to the symbols of their common humanity. My study, in many ways, has been a tribute to these socializing values. In exposing the presence of market-orientated premises in the nonprofit sector, I called attention to the dangers that that orientation has for social intervention in the United States. There is some amount of anachronism in such a project but, I argue, a useful anachronism.

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Vita

Emily Kay Balanoff was born and raised in Austin, Texas. She began her professional journey as an actress; receiving her B.F.A in Fine Arts from The University of Texas at Austin and working in local and regional theatre. It was while working at the Texas Capitol, however, that she discovered that politics was the greatest drama of all. She was hooked, not only because of the great performances but also because of what this passion-play meant to everyday Texans. In pursuing this newly discovered interest, she completed her Masters' degree in political communication at Texas State University in San Marcos and entered the PhD program in communication studies at The University of Texas at Austin.

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